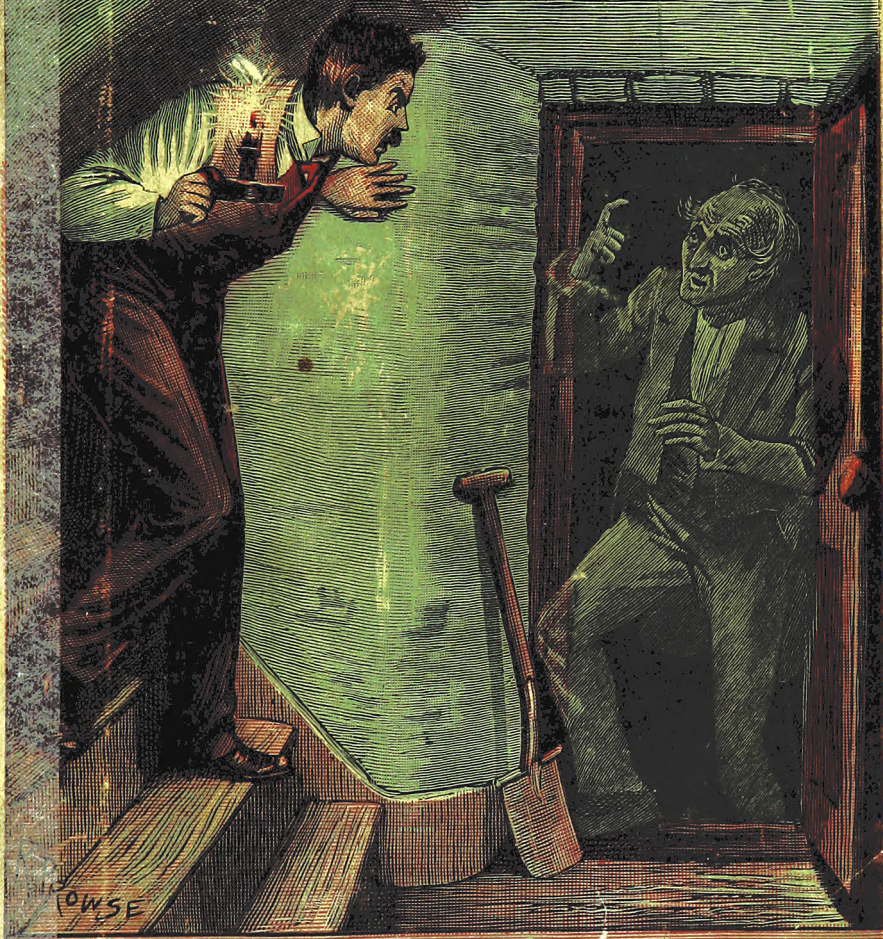
NEW DETECTIVE STORIES

BY

SIR GILBERT CAMPBELL.



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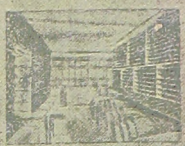
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NEW DETECTIVE STORIES.

THE MISER'S HOARD.

For many years old Simon Grates had occupied a tumble-down old house in one of the narrow streets which are to be found in that part of the Borough which the hand of modern improvement has still left untouched. A grimy, dilapidated building, the glass and the upper windows of which were nearly all shattered, whilst the door was utterly devoid of paint: and during a high wind the slates would whirl off the roof to the extreme danger of the passers-by. But for all its rickety appearance the old house in Grime Street was a perfect fortress. The door was plated with iron, and had the newest and most effective lock; the lower windows were guarded by massive iron bars, and if an intruder had contrived to gain admission by the roof, he would have found himself confronted by a strong brick wall, which entirely shut off the upper portion of the house from the lower. Many gentlemen in the burglary line had found Miser Grates' crib too hard a nut to crack, and had retired, baffled, from the attempt.

Simon Grates had done well to take the precautions he did, for the report of his vast accumulation of wealth of all kinds was widely spread throughout the neighbourhood, and had not his house been a perfect fortress, it would have been broken into repeatedly.

It would be hard to say what Grates' business was, or, rather, what it was not, for if there was a penny to be made by anything, he was ready and willing to become the purchaser.

The old man lived entirely alone with his grand-daughter, Prudence Hatwell, the orphan child of his only daughter, who had been dead for many years.

Prudence was a tall, slender girl, with pleasing features, and manifested a strong feeling of affection for her grandfather, in spite of his occasional harshness towards her.

"Prue," said the old man one evening, as he sat over his scanty meal of dry bread and a rasher of bacon, "I think I am going to give up business and retire into the country."

"Oh, that would be nice," exclaimed the girl, clapping her hands. "I have never seen the green fields in my life, and I should dearly like to live in the country."

"I am afraid the country air would give you a tremendous appetite," remarked the old man, with a suspicious glance at his grand-daughter. "And I am very poor, you know."

"But then we can live for a mere nothing in the country," returned the girl, "and think how nice it would be to live out of dingy London."

"People don't live for a mere nothing anywhere, Prue," retorted the old man, "but at any rate we are going the day after to-morrow. A little cottage near Uxbridge came into my hands some years ago, and as the tenant is just dead, I may as well occupy it as permit it to remain empty."

Prue's face fell. "That is rather a sudden resolve, isn't it, grandfather?" said she.

"Ah," snarled the old man, "you are thinking of that fine sweetheart of yours, Joe Varley. Well, if he wants to see you he can come down to Uxbridge; the walk will stretch his legs a bit."

"Joe won't mind that a bit," answered Prue; "but he needn't walk: he can come by train."

"Ah, young people are fonder of spending money than of earning it," remarked Simon Grates; "but, mind you, there is a good deal of valuable property in this house, and I want to tell you where to find it. I feel very queer to-night, and if anything happens to me, do you go to Sharples, the lawyer in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and he will tell you everything, for you have been a good girl to me, and will have the little I leave behind me."

"Don't talk like that, grandfather; you make me feel quite frightened," remarked Prudence.

"Take this paper," said the old man, handing her a torn piece with some writing upon it, "join the bit Lawyer Sharples will give you to it, and it will explain everything."

"Hush," exclaimed Prudence, suddenly, "there is that sound again which I heard before."

Both listened intently, and then a sudden crash of falling brickwork in the upper part of the house made them both start to their feet.

The old man made for a drawer in which he always kept a

loaded revolver, but before he could reach it, the door was burst open, and a man, rushing into the room, struck Miser Grates a blow on the head with a life-preserver which laid him dead upon the floor.

With a wild shriek Prudence grasped the murderer's arm, and as her eyes fell on his face, she saw that he wore a black mask.

With a fierce oath, he disengaged himself, and again the deadly weapon rose and fell, stretching Prudence across her grandfather's body.

"I didn't want to hurt the girl," muttered the man, "but there was no help for it. Now, let me see what there is to be found in the way of swag."

The search was not a successful one, for beyond about twenty shillings worth of silver and a few coppers, nothing of value was discovered, and with a savage oath he began to ransack the adjoining room.

The same result evidently attended this search, for in about half an hour he returned again with a dark frown on his brow. "I think I have settled the pair of them for nothing," growled he. "What's this bit of paper in the girl's hand?" he added, as he stooped and took it up; "a precious lot of gibberish it seems, but I will look at it when I get away. Curse the fellow for bragging about the valuables in the house. I have been thoroughly sold, and had better get away before harm comes to me."

He made his way upstairs, and creeping through a hole he had pierced in the brick wall, which ran across the upper portion of the house, gained the roof and disappeared in the darkness.

It was daylight before Prudence recovered her senses, and then, in spite of the cruel pain she felt, she contrived to crawl to the front door and give the alarm.

When the neighbours came in it was found that the old man was quite dead, and Prudence was so injured that it was necessary to remove her to the nearest hospital. She had, however, the presence of mind to ask the police to communicate with the lawyer whose name her grandfather had mentioned, and he took care that the house should be placed in the hands of a trustworthy caretaker.

For nearly three weeks Prudence was unable to move from the hospital, and when she did so, her first visit was to Sharples the lawyer, who said: "There is certainly a will in your favour, but where the property has got to I don't know.

There is about three hundred pounds in the bank, so you will be beyond the reach of want for the time, but Mr. Grates ought to have been worth at least ten thousand pounds."

Joe Varley had many interviews with his sweetheart, and they often talked together over the mysterious robber who had so nearly taken two lives on the night of his burglarious entrance into the house in Grime Street.

Examination of the premises had shown that he must have got into an empty house some three doors off. He had ascended to the house and got into the miser's domicile through the dilapidated roof. Finding an obstacle in the brickwork built across the upper story, he had deliberately gone to work to pierce it, and when the task was concluded, had made his unexpected appearance, which had been attended with such fatal consequences.

"Prue," said Joe Varley, "do you know that sometimes I feel responsible for a good deal of what occurred in Grime Street."

"Goodness me, Joe, what can you mean?" returned the girl. "You will make my blood run cold if you talk so."

"Why, you see, Prue, a lot of fellows at our shop" (Joe was a foreman in a large printing establishment) "got to chaffing me, and telling me that I was going to marry the grand-daughter of a millionaire, and one day at the pub, where I go to get my snack in the middle of the day, a seedy-looking chap came up, and, after making himself precious agreeable, asked me a heap of questions about you and your grandfather and the house and such like, and I, like a fool as I was, let out all I knew, and a great deal more, perhaps, for he had given me a glass or two, and that set my tongue wagging."

"Oh, Joe," exclaimed the girl, "perhaps it was the burglar, after all; they say that they go about trying to find out what houses are worth robbing. Anyhow he did not get much, though he robbed me of that precious scrap of paper grandfather had just given me; and the piece Mr. Sharples has is no use without the one I lost. I cannot make head or tail of it. Here is the copy of it; let us see if you are clever enough to solve the riddle."

She extracted from her pocket a piece of paper upon which were written these words:

raid of being robbed, and
valuables in a safe place,
myself, in my cottage at Ux
cellar and measure twelve

corner, then dig three
a small box made of i
the key, by my will it is

"Well, that is a precious hard nut to crack," remarked Joe, after he had read the document over two or three times. "The one thing certain is that there is something in a cellar, but where I can't say."

"Why, at Uxbridge, of course; what am I thinking of?" exclaimed Prudence, suddenly. "We have never seen the cottage that poor grandfather spoke of. I shall go down and look for myself."

"I move an amendment," remarked Joe, sliding his arm round her waist, "suppose we get married first, and then we can go down there and never come back any more."

"What do you mean, Joe?" returned the girl, a bright blush suffusing her cheek.

"Just this, Prue. You see, if you never get any more money, you are quite a little heiress. I have saved a bit too, and this very morning I got an offer as foreman in a large printing establishment in that very identical Uxbridge, and so, if you will agree, the cottage will come in very handy, and after work we can have a hunt after grand-dad's treasure."

After some slight demur Prue yielded. Mr. Sharples handed over the keys of the cottage, and one afternoon, after a visit to the parish church, the young couple started away for Uxbridge, from which point they intended to commence their matrimonial cruise.

The cottage was a very pretty one, very decently furnished, with a nice garden at the back, and various outbuildings which they had not expected.

All at once Prue gave a little scream and clung tightly to her husband's arm. "There is a horrid man following us. I am sure he is dogging our footsteps. I saw him outside the church, then at the station, and here he is again."

Joe turned quickly round, and an angry flush rose to his face. "Well, I'm hanged," exclaimed he, "if it is not the chap that pumped me so dry about grand-dad's affairs. Here, mister, I should like to have a word with you."

The man, however, did not appear desirous of accepting the invitation, but pushed his way through a gap in the hedge and sped across the fields at a pace which defied pursuit.

"I'll just go to the police station and give them a hint about

that gentleman," muttered Joe, "for his conduct strikes me as just a little suspicious."

For a week, however, the young married couple were disturbed by no unwelcome intruders, but though the attics, and indeed every room in the house, had been thoroughly examined, no sign of Simon Grates' hidden treasure had been discovered. Joe had now settled steadily down to his work.

One day, as Joe returned to his home, he found his wife standing pale and trembling in the porch.

"What ails you, my girl?" said he, going up to her and putting his arm round her; "you look clean scared."

"Oh, Joe," she murmured, between her sobs, "he is down there."

"Down where?" asked her husband, in much surprise, "and who is he that is down there?"

"Grandfather," answered she; "I went down to get some wood, and there he was, standing in the right hand corner. I flew upstairs again and did not dare remain in the house, so I waited until you came home."

"Why, you must have been frightened at a shadow, my dear," returned Joe, endeavouring to reassure her, though in his heart he felt extremely uncomfortable. "I will go and see what it is."

He went down the little flight of stairs, but returned again in another minute, with his face perfectly livid.

"You were right, my girl," faltered he; "and as I don't like such visitors, I think we had best clear out."

"Where is it now?" asked Prue, with a shudder.

"In the cellar, and likely to remain there," returned her husband; "for I shut the door after me and drew the bolt."

As if to contradict his assertion, the shadowy figure of Simon Grates stood before them, looking exactly as he did in life, and well. There was something mystic and intangible about him. He crossed the room to the fireplace, stooped, and appeared to touch the heavy poker, then, moving to the window, raised his hand in a gesture of warning, and, melting away, vanished before their very eyes.

"Well, I am glad it's gone," said Joe, wiping the perspiration from his forehead. "But, Prue, my girl, what ails you?"

Prue indeed was nearly fainting, and it was some time before the attentions of her beloved husband could bring her round. Husband and wife both agreed that the appearance of Simon Grates' spirit meant something, but what that something was they were unable to determine. As for searching the cellar to

see if the ghost had left any indication of the reason of his visit, neither Joe or Prue felt the slightest inclination to venture down to those regions, and it was only after a hearty supper had in some way diminished their supernatural fears that they ventured to creep upstairs to bed.

Joe, however, could not sleep, and long after Prue had sunk to slumber he lay tossing about, expecting that something would happen, though he would have been very much puzzled to prove what that something was.

All at once a slight grating noise fell upon his ear, which appeared to come from the room below. When he had no supernatural foes to deal with Joe was as brave as a lion. "That is a glazin' diamond," muttered he, as he rose stealthily from his bed and pulled on a pair of trousers; "some cove is cutting a pane of glass out of the parlour window. How sweet are the pleasures of the country,—no troubles or worries, nothing but burglars and ghosts, and, of course, they are not worth mentioning."

With that thought running through his brain, he cautiously descended the stairs, and, entering the parlour, saw a figure in the act of getting through the window, the latch of which had been drawn back by means of the removal of a pane of glass. Casting one glance at the intruder to make sure that it was not Grandfather Grates come to pay a second visit, Joe made a bound for the poker, and brought it down with a heavy thwack upon the burglar's shoulders, and then, as the man, with an exclamation of pain, dropped on the floor, he delivered another blow upon the head which laid him senseless.

The noise alarmed Prue, who hurried downstairs, just in time to see her husband securing the robber's hands in a most artistic manner with a piece of rope which he had fetched from the kitchen.

The man was handed over to the police, and proved to be a well-known burglar, for whose apprehension a reward of £50 had been offered, which, much to Joe's delight, was paid over to him. As he returned from giving his evidence, he found his wife dancing about the kitchen, waving a scrap of paper in her hand.

"See here, Joe," cried she, "that bad man must have dropped this. He was the robber that murdered poor grandfather, and, doubtless, he followed us here, thinking that we had found the treasure which he failed in discovering. Read this."

Without in the least understanding her, Joe took the paper,

and, with a very puzzled expression of face, read the following disjointed sentences :

I have always been af
so have hidden all my
which is known only to
bridge. Go down to the
paces from right hand
feet, and you will find
ron. My lawyer has
all for Prudence.

"Why, the chap must have escaped from a lunatic asylum, to carry such rubbish about with him," exclaimed Joe, impatiently. "What does it all mean?"

"You silly boy," cried his wife, "have you forgotten the other scrap of paper? Here, join the two together, and see what you make of it then."

He did so, and his face brightened up as he read as follows :

I have always been af - raid of being robbed, and
so have hidden all my - valuables in a safe place,
which is known only to - myself, in my cottage at Ux
bridge. Go down to the - cellar and measure twelve
paces from right hand - corner, then dig three
feet, and you will find - a small box made of i
ron. My lawyer has - the key, by my will it is
all for Prudence.

"Where are you going?" said Prue, as, after reading the paper, Joe made a bound for the garden.

"To get a spade," returned he. "Whether grandfather is there or not, I am going to have a look for that there iron box."

The receptacle was found in the spot designated, but there was no occasion to apply to Lawyer Sharples, for the key was in the box, and not only was there a goodly stock of gold and bank notes within, but several magnificent diamond and emerald ornaments, which, doubtless, Miser Grates had, at some time or other, picked up a bargain.

The little scrap of paper, though it did not produce a capital conviction, sent the burglar to penal servitude for life, so that the young couple were not likely to be troubled by his visits

again. As for the spirit of Miser Grates, it did not put in a second appearance, perhaps from not being able to find its way to the fine large house to which Joe and Prue removed shortly after they had been lucky enough to discover the Miser's Hoard.

A DAGGER OF GLASS.

THE winter had been an exceptionally severe one in the Belgian capital, and much want and suffering had naturally resulted amongst the poorer classes of the city.

The richer portion of the community, however, found fresh enjoyments in the winter; and sledging and skating, both by daylight and torchlight, were amusements which were greatly in vogue. In addition to these, there were balls, masquerades, card parties, and concerts, so that whilst misery and starvation were working their cruel wills in one portion of the city, the other was a blaze of revelry and enjoyment.

Amongst the young leaders of fashion was Count Louis Borgen, the last descendant of an ancient Walloon family. He was young, handsome, courtly, and a general favourite, but he was also wild and dissipated, a gambler, duellist, and libertine, and rumour reported that he was mixed up with more than one of the secret societies which were just at that period disturbing the peace and tranquillity of many of the crowned heads of Europe.

Count Louis was an equerry to the king, and, in his turn, had to perform his turn of duty, which usually lasted for a week.

It was a bitterly cold evening as he strolled into the well-lighted saloon of one of the most fashionable clubs of Bruxelles and returned the greetings of many friends and acquaintances, who had preceded him thither.

"Well, Louis, my friend, how goes the world with you?" cried a tall, slender young man, in the handsome green uniform of the Belgian chasseurs.

"Much the same as usual," returned the count, with a slight yawn; "court duty a bore, cards untrustworthy, and lovely woman ever flinging herself at our heads."

"You are too confident, my dear fellow," remarked an older man, with the rosette of the Order of Leopold at his button-hole. "By my faith, Amalia de Leuchtenbourg, so far from flinging herself at your head, has plainly given you the cold shoulder, in spite of all your pretty attentions."

Louis Borgen's face turned crimson. He had been so spoiled that he could not brook contradiction or opposition of any kind. At first he seemed inclined to return an angry reply, but controlling himself by a powerful effort, he replied with a light laugh, "Age has its privileges, M. le Marquis, and so I will take no notice of your uncalled for remark, except by saying that it is one of the commonest tricks of a flirt to hold back in order to make the pursuit hotter."

"Age!" retorted the marquis, with a comical expression of countenance; "why, my good boy, I am only forty-two, an age to which you are never likely to come unless you learn to bridle your tongue a little more. See, there is Paolo di Vasari scowling at you with a look as black as thunder. You appear to forget that he is a suitor for the hand of the fair Amalia as well as yourself."

"Insolent foreigner!" remarked Count Louis, in audible tones; "we ought not to encourage such scum for—"

He was not allowed to finish his sentence, for, with a bound like that of a tiger, a young, dark featured man, who had heard every word which had been uttered, was by his side.

"I would have torn out your lying tongue, Louis Borgen," said he, "for what you said before, but I did not wish to compromise a lady's name; but now that you have alluded to me in the manner you have, I can only express my resentment in this manner," and, with the back of his hand, he struck Count Borgen twice across the face.

Had not the bystanders interfered, there would have been an unseemly scuffle, but as it was, the two adversaries were held apart before they could close with each other.

Louis Borgen was livid with rage. "Di Vasari," cried he, "I will have satisfaction for this. Send your seconds to me when you like; sword or pistol are alike to me, for, by Heaven! I will have your life for the insult you have put upon me."

Di Vasari bowed calmly; he had curbed the momentary instinct of passion which had made him strike his rival across the face, and felt that he must now accept the inevitable consequence of his act. The other members of the club, who had been witnesses of the affray, sauntered leisurely away, for such scenes as this were not uncommon, and the only remarks made were as to the poor chance Di Vasari would have against so skilled a swordsman and pistol-shot as Louis Borgen.

Paolo di Vasari went home to the suite of apartments he occupied in an old-fashioned quarter of the city with a certain chill stealing over his heart, for he felt his end was not far off.

He was madly in love with Amalia de Leuchtenbourg, and it was this feeling which had prompted him to take the extreme course he had with Louis Borgen, whom he looked upon as a dangerous rival.

Paolo di Vasari was a descendant of one of the oldest Venetian families. His ancestors had more than once been members of the famous Council of Ten, and his mother's family name was to be found in the Golden Book of Florence. He had, however, imbibed a disgust for his nationality, and for the purpose of study had settled in Bruxelles, where his introduction had procured him admission into the best society of the capital. During his residence there he had met Amalia de Leuchtenbourg, and it was her undisguised preference for him that had excited the wrath of Louis Borgen, who had made advances in the same quarter.

After the encounter at the club, Di Vasari sat meditating over the probable result for some time, until he was aroused by the entrance of his old and attached servant, Silvio Malatesta, who asked anxiously what he could do for his young master.

"Nothing, my trusty old friend," replied the young man, "except to see that all my art treasures and my collection of Italian curiosities are packed up and despatched to the Museum of Venice, to which I have bequeathed them, in case of my death."

"But you are not going to die, signor," said the old man, fixing a glance of intent interest upon his master.

"Death is near to us when we least expect it, Silvio," returned Di Vasari. He would doubtless have added more, when a knock was heard at the door, announcing the arrival of the two seconds sent by Count Louis Borgen.

These gentlemen merely stated that they had come to demand satisfaction for the blow, but that the meeting must be adjourned for a week, as Count Borgen was on duty at the Palace. They, however, considering the nature of the offence, desired that the duel should be a mortal one, and that if an exchange of shots should not prove decisive, the quarrel should be terminated with the rapier.

Paolo di Vasari agreed to everything, and after the seconds had retired, sat writing for some time in his library, which was filled with a wonderful collection of arms, enamels, bronzes, and various other curiosities of Italian art. The shadow of death was close upon him, and he felt he had but a short respite; for, unused as he was to arms, he felt he had but small chance against so accomplished a duellist as the Count Louis Borgen.

. . . . . .

Belgian society at this time experienced a strange and sudden shock. It had been arranged that a midnight picnic should be held in the public park, and the gayest and wildest of the community had agreed to be present at it. Several large tents had been pitched, and preparations on an extensive scale made for the supper, but it was a *sine quâ non* that all guests were to come to the *rendezvous* in sledges.

It was long past midnight on the appointed evening, and the guests were wondering at the non-appearance of Louis Borgen, who was not wont to be behind hand on such occasions.

"He said that his duties at the Palace would not prevent his joining us," said the wealthy widow of a Belgian banker.

"Ah, my dear madam," remarked a major of light cavalry, "if you want courtesy you must seek for it in the army, and not expect to find it amongst courtiers."

"On my faith!" muttered a wild young *roué*, "Borgen is not playing fair. He promised me my revenge at ecarté, and considering his coming duel with Di Vasari, my chance of winning back what I have lost to him seems a bad one."

"Why, you are getting quite nervous," returned his companion, with a laugh, "as if he would not settle accounts with the Venetians in no time."

"I don't know," answered the other doubtfully; "if he knocks him over at the first shot, well and good, but if it comes to sword play, there is no more awkward antagonist to stand before than a man who has not been accustomed to handle a foil, and I believe Di Vasari may be included in that category."

"Here he comes! here he comes!" exclaimed a dozen voices, as the well-known sledge of Count Louis Borgen appeared in sight; "and what a pace he is coming at too!"

The remark was a perfectly just one, for the vehicle, drawn by a pair of sorrel steeds, swept with incalculable rapidity across the frozen plain, and in another minute the horses, having rushed madly into the tent-ropes, were floundering in a confused mass in the snow, with the over-turned sleigh lying in a heap within dangerous proximity to their struggling heels.

A dozen ready hands were ready to extricate the luckless driver from his nest of furs, but when this had been done, he lay motionless and silent.

"Why, the man is dead!" exclaimed the marquis, with whom Count Louis had so nearly had an altercation at the club on the night of his quarrel with Di Vasari. "Surely he cannot have broken his neck in the soft snow."

No, Count Louis Borgen had not broken his neck, but there was a cruel stain on the left side of his white shirt, from which the life blood had oozed out, and the limbs, which a short time before had been so full of grace and life, were now stiff in death.

. . . . . .

When, however, the body of the unfortunate young man came to be examined, a fresh and terrible sensation spread through Belgian society. The death wound had evidently been inflicted by one of those glass poignards, so commonly used in Italy during the reign of the Borgias, and some two or three inches of the splintered point were discovered at the bottom of the wound.

An inquiry was at once made as to where such a weapon could have been procured, and by degrees it was remembered that Di Vasari had several such in his collection of Italian curiosities. Further investigation disclosed that some two or three inches of the point of one of these were missing, and then it was remembered how much the Venetian had to dread from the keen eye and practised hand of the count in the approaching duel.

The circumstantial evidence was so strong that Paolo di Vasari was arrested, and after a brief examination, during which he strongly protested his innocence, committed to prison, pending further inquiries.

Though the quiet manner and easy grace of the Venetian had won favour for him amongst many members of the fashionable circles of Bruxelles, yet the tide now turned decidedly against him, for the murder was looked on as a cowardly means of avoiding the satisfaction required by the laws of the duello.

The grief of Amalia de Leuchtenbourg was extreme, for apart from the strong feeling of affection she felt for the Venetian, her pride was deeply wounded at the thought that a man she had so favoured should have descended to save his life by an act of cowardly assassination.

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For more than a couple of hours a number of men had been continually entering the side door of a low beer-house situated in the suburb of Saint Josseten de Noodt. The visitors glanced around suspiciously before they crossed the threshold, and then passed into an inner room, pausing in a sort of vestibule to put on a cloak with a hood, which concealed the face, but had two apertures for the use of the eyes.

All took their places in silence on benches placed along

the walls of the rooms, and waited until a masked figure, seated in a high-backed chair at the end of the room, should give the signal that the meeting was opened.

At length he sprang from his seat, and drawing a dagger from beneath his cloak, struck a small gong which stood on a stool by his side.

In an instant each hooded figure started up, and every right hand appeared from under its wrappings armed with a gleaming dagger.

"Brethren of the Steel of Justice," said the President, "we are convened hither to learn whether the good work is going on. Brother of the Steel in the North, how goes it?"

"Well," answered a masked figure, speaking from the quarter designated. "The rule of monarchy is drawing to a close, and of traitors in the land there are none."

"'Tis well," returned the President. "Brother of the Steel in the South, how goes the good work?"

A figure staggered to its feet, and in quivering accents replied, "There was a traitor, but he exists no longer."

"'Tis well again," answered the President; "let us hear your report. Who was the traitor?"

"Louis Borgen," answered the member of the secret society.

"He was denounced nearly a month back," responded the President, "and has had a long span of life. Give us the particulars of how justice was done."

"Easily and simply," answered the member who had last spoken; "the order for execution was placed in my hands, and I have done my duty."

"Brother, you have done well," responded the President. "Sure and certain information had reached us that this man, Louis Borgen, an affiliated member of our society, had betrayed many of our secrets to the police. Tell us now how the deed was done, and upon whom suspicion rests."

"The dead man," answered the masked figure, "was driving out alone in his sleigh, bound for some scene of revelry, when I stepped out from a place of concealment in a lonely part, and craved a moment's speech with him. He pulled up his horses, when I sprang forward and stabbed him to the heart, and as he fell, I struck the horses, who started off at a mad gallop, bearing his lifeless body to the spot where his wild companions were awaiting him."

"It is well," said the President again; "and upon whom does the burden of the crime rest."

The masked figure beat his breast piteously, as he replied,

"Upon a totally innocent man—upon Paolo di Vasari. I stole the glass dagger, with which the deed was done, from his museum of curiosities, and after cleaning it carefully, replaced it, never noticing, fool that I was, that the point had broken off, and that the shattered weapon would be sure evidence against the best and kindest of masters."

"Hush! Brother of the South," interrupted the President, severely, "such words as 'kindest master' do not sound well in the mouth of a Brother of the Steel."

"I care not," answered the former speaker. "I came here to-night to crave permission to speak openly and disclose the truth, so as to save an innocent man from the penalty of bloodshed."

"It may not be, Brother," answered the President; "our rules and tenets are irrevocable, and circumstances cannot alter them."

"I speak with all deference," was the answer; "but as I have done the deed which was assigned to me, may I not crave some privilege, and save the kind master, whom I look on almost as a son?"

"You have no right to any concession," returned the President, sternly; "but as you are an old member, we will debate what shall be done for you. Stand aloof whilst we consult."

"If you do not grant my request, I will, at my own risk, disclose the whole truth," answered the applicant boldly.

No reply was made, but, at a sign from the President, half-a-dozen of the black-robed forms drew around his seat and began to convene together in a whisper.

The debate was not a long one. The members of the council room resumed their seats, and the President, whose dark eyes flashed through the orifices of his hood, again spoke. "Brother of the Steel of the South," said he, "I, as the mouthpiece of the brethren here assembled, give you all praise and honour for the daring deed you have done in striking down a traitor; the more so, that though he was young and active, and you old and feeble, you did not hesitate to strike him in front as a man should do. I appoint you, for this valiant deed, vice-president of our society, and request that you will take your place by me, whilst the brethren file before you and pay you the homage which is your due."

The newly appointed officer made no reply, but did as he was ordered, and the dusky line of black-robed phantoms passed before him, bowing the head as they did so.

When this ceremony was at an end, the President's voice

once more rang out clear and distinct. "This, brethren, is how we reward merit; now let me teach you how I punish insubordination and disaffection. Seize the vice-president and strip from him the gown he is unworthy of wearing."

Four black-robed figures seized upon the old man, and tearing away the cloak and hood, secured his hands with a cord. "Silvio Malatesta," said the President, "I expel you from our society as one who, under the pretence of obeying its orders, has only furthered his own ends. You slew Louis Borgen because his hand menaced your master's life, not because he was a traitor to our body. Further, you have threatened to disclose the doings of the society to save the life of a man who is nothing to us. We have but one punishment for such an offence, and that is—Death. Place before the backslider the steel, the cord, and the poison, that he may make his choice."

Three sable figures held out to the condemned man a keen, glittering knife, a looped cord, and a small silver chalice containing some dark liquid. "Choose, Silvio Malatesta," said the President; "you have yet ten minutes to live."

"Merciless dogs!" cried the old man, as if spurred to sudden fury, "I expected this at your hands, and have taken my precautions. I sent a full confession of my crime, with my signature properly attested, to the police, and I also gave them notice of this place and the hour of the meeting. I must die, I know, but, like Samson, I shall bring down the temple with me."

As he spoke, there was a sound of heavy knocking at the door, and a stern voice called out, "Open, in the name of the law!"

In an instant the President saw his danger, and snatching the dagger from the hands which held it, buried it in the old man's breast, who sank to the ground with a gasping sigh. The members of the society rushed hither and thither like trapped rats, but every passage of exit was barred, and as the door fell inwards a party of soldiers rushed in with fixed bayonets.

"We are too late," muttered the Superintendent of Police, casting a glance of regret on the lifeless body of Silvio Malatesta; "but we have made a good haul for all that. Bind them, my lads, and do not let one escape."

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The old servant's death had not been unavailing: his written testimony cleared his master, who was at once set at liberty without a stain upon his character. He had, however, taken a dislike to Bruxelles, and, after his marriage with Amalia de Leuchtenbourg, returned to Venice, after erecting a magnificent monument over the remains of his devoted servant, Silvio Malatesta.

THE MARK ON THE MAT.

"STRANGE case of murder that, for we can call it nothing else," remarked a stout, middle-aged gentleman, addressing a young man who was seated in the same compartment with him in the mail train which was rattling away on the road to Dover.

"And what is more strange," he continued, "is, that the police seem to have let the real criminal slip through their fingers."

The young man addressed was fair and exceedingly good-looking. He had made a leap into the carriage just as the train was on the point of starting, and did not seem at all attired for a trip across the channel. He started from what appeared to be a deep reverie, and repeated vacantly, "Murder, I have not heard of one. Where was the crime committed?"

"There is an account of it in all the evening papers," answered the middle-aged man. "Here is the *Echo*, you can read about it yourself. Poor thing, only twenty-nine and already beginning to make a name."

The young man took the paper languidly, as if he had not much interest in the matter, and cast his eye over the paragraph to which his fellow-passenger had alluded. Scarcely had he done so than his cheek, which had been very pale, flushed to a vivid scarlet, and then again assumed its pallid hue. Seating himself firmly in the corner of the compartment, so that the heaving and swinging of the train should have no effect upon him, he continued his perusal of the journal. This is what he read:

"MURDER OF AN AUTHORESS.—This afternoon a strange and terrible discovery was made at 51 Wensleydale Gardens, South Kensington, the residence of Mrs. Waldron, who has, during the past three years, made so great a name in literary circles under the *nom-de-plume* of Flora Kettering. About half-past four o'clock on this afternoon, her maid entered the drawing-room to ask some question, and was horrified at perceiving her mistress stretched upon the carpet, near a side door, in a pool of blood. She at once raised the alarm, and medical assistance

was called in. It appeared, however, that the unfortunate lady had been dead for nearly an hour, from a stab inflicted under the left ear. The weapon with which the deed had been done, a Japanese dagger, which was used as a paper-knife, lay beside her on the floor. There were no signs of a struggle, save that an ornamental chair which stood near the fireplace was overturned. The motive of the crime was apparently robbery, for the drawer of a Davenport, in which the servants state that their deceased mistress was in the habit of keeping her valuables locked, was open, though there were no signs of any violence having been used. Mr. Waldron, who had been down to his club, returned at the moment of the discovery, and the servants assured our reporter that the scene was a most heart-rending one. Mr. Edgar Bramsleigh, an artist, the brother of the deceased, had called at Wensleydale Gardens at about half-past one, but had left after a visit of some three-quarters of an hour's duration. No one had seen the deceased lady alive since then. Enquiry was made at that gentleman's lodgings, but the answer was that he had left home about eleven o clock A.M., and had not returned since. Mr. Waldron, in reply to some questions addressed him by Sergeant Rance of the Detective Department, stated that he believed there was a considerable sum in notes in the Davenport, his wife having the day before received payment for a series of articles which she had written for Messrs. Standish and Taper, the well-known publishers. The deceased lady was only twenty-nine years of age. (To be continued in our next edition.)"

With devouring eagerness the young man perused this sad story, and when he had arrived at its conclusion, he allowed the paper to drop from his hands, and sank back with an exclamation, which more resembled a groan than a sigh.

"It is too horrible," he muttered in an undertone—"too horrible; poor Flo!"

The middle-aged man gazed with some curiosity on the evident emotion of his fellow-passenger. "I fear," said he, "that I have inadvertantly caused you some pain. Did you know the poor murdered lady?"

The young man gazed upon him as if he hardly understood the meaning of the question, and then stammered out, "Oh, yes, I knew her quite well. Do you think it is true?"

"True," returned the other with a half laugh; "do you think a paper would print such a statement without its being properly authenticated? I wish they could have got hold of

that artist fellow, Edgar Bramsleigh. I hear that he was a sad scamp, and I expect could tell something about the murder; that is, if he chose to do so."

Again the flush rose to the young man's cheek. "What do you know about Edgar Bramsleigh?" demanded he, angrily.

"Little good" was the reply. "I am a member of a firm of solicitors, and I recollect we had no end of trouble with the young fellow, who would not pay a client of ours, a most respectable man, a tailor in Box Street. In the end he obtained a committal order, and then the money was paid by this poor lady who has been so foully murdered."

"And so, because a man does not pay his tailor's bill, you consider him capable of committing a murder," remarked the young man, with a sneer. "If the outside world were to judge the acts of solicitors by the same standard, there is no crime in the calendar bad enough for them to commit."

"I consider your remarks on an honourable profession exceedingly impertinent and ill-bred," remarked the middle-aged man, "and I will thank you not to address me again."

"I shall do as I please about that," retorted his adversary. "You began by casting most unwarrantable suspicions upon an innocent man, and—"

"How do you know that he is innocent?" returned the solicitor, sarcastically; "you really seem wonderfully well informed, let me tell you. All I know about it is, that a man without commercial honesty would, in my opinion, be guilty of any crime to get the money to squander upon his own selfish pleasures."

"I suppose you never owed a trifle in your life," answered the young man. "You ought to be sent to some exhibition, and labelled a *lusus naturæ*, in the shape of an honest lawyer."

"Keep your impertinence to yourself," exclaimed the infuriated member of the law, "and find some one better to champion than a swindling young hound like Edgar Bramsleigh."

A slap on the side of the face, accompanied by the words, "Insolent blackguard," was the reply to this speech, and in a moment the two men were locked together in a fierce encounter.

The swinging and swaying of the train prevented much damage being done, and in the midst of the encounter the train drew up with a shrill whistle, amidst the cries of the porters of, "Dover Town."

The officials on the platform, as soon as they perceived the affray which was going on in the carriage, tore open the door and separated the combatants. "The fellow accosted me,"

panted the middle-aged man, "and I give him into custody. Here is my card, my name is Benson, Jonas Benson, of the firm of Hicks, Styles & Benson, Lincolns Inn Fields."

"The blackguard insulted me first," said the young man, whose chest was heaving furiously with the intensity of his anger. "I haven't got a card, but my name is Edgar Bramsleigh, of 30 Harman Street, Fitzroy Square, and I am an artist by profession."

The officials on the platform exchanged looks of surprise, and the stationmaster observed, "I think you gentlemen had better walk into my private office. Pray hold your tongue, sir," he added, as the solicitor began to speak; "I know quite well what I am doing."

In a few minutes the little group was ushered into the office, and then the stationmaster remarked, "Mr. Bramsleigh, I regret to say that a telegram has been received by the police here authorising your detention should you attempt to leave the country. May I ask where you have taken your ticket for?"

The young man appeared so dumbfounded by this statement that for the moment he could make no reply. "Detain me!" said he; "there must be some mistake. I am only going to Paris, and should return to-morrow."

As he uttered these words a couple of policemen entered the office, and one of them said, "Edgar Bramsleigh, I have a warrant for your arrest."

"My arrest!" exclaimed Edgar, "and on what charge?"

"On charge of murdering Flora Waldron of Wensleydale Gardens, and I caution you that any statement you may make now can be used against you."

"I shan't press my charge, stationmaster," remarked Mr. Benson. "If the young ruffian gets clear I may perhaps take proceedings. I suppose I can go."

"I don't know so much about that," answered the stationmaster, disgusted at the solicitor's vindictiveness; "there's a fine of forty shillings for breaking and damaging the company's property. But there, I'll let you off this time, only don't do it again," and before the solicitor, who was purple with indignation, could utter a word, a couple of stout porters removed him from the stationmaster's office, whilst the police took Edgar Bramsleigh to the platform to await the next train to town.

The evidence against Edgar Bramsleigh began to assume a very serious character. Upon being searched at the police station, bank notes to the value of one hundred and fifty

pounds were found on him, and these were afterwards identified by the bank clerks as being a portion of those paid to Mrs. Waldron on Messrs. Standish and Taper's cheque. Moreover, the servant girl who opened the door swore that he must have been the last person who saw her mistress alive, and that just before his leaving she heard a sound which resembled furniture being overturned.

In spite of repeated caution, the prisoner, who was much excited, volunteered a statement. It was to this effect.

"Now that my poor sister is dead, my lips are unsealed. She lived most unhappily with her husband, whose reckless extravagance was a constant drag on her. No one knew the life she led with that man, or the ill-treatment she experienced if she did not find the money to satisfy his vicious longings. At last she could bear it no longer, and, sending for me, told me that she had made up her mind to fly from England and take refuge with an old friend in Paris, a Madame de Beaurepaire, until terms for a legal separation had been agreed on. She gave me money to buy several articles for her, which were to be sent to an hotel where I took a room for her, under the name of Mrs. Bramsleigh; the rest of the money I was to bank for her in Paris, where I was to go and return by the following train. The idea of my having killed my dear sister is preposterous. All the statements I have made can be proved, and I court every inquiry. When I was searched, a letter from my poor sister to Madame de Beaurepaire was found on me that will prove that what I have said is true. It is all too horrible to think of; she seemed so happy at the idea of escape, and laughed like a child when I upset a chair in my haste to carry out her wishes."

Everything proved that Edgar Bramsleigh's statements were all correct, so he was discharged; and the murder of Flora Waldron still remained an unsolved mystery.

Edgar Bramsleigh, however, was half mad with rage, and swore that he would devote all his time to the discovery of her murderer, and with this resolve he consulted a private detective, one Matthew Wenlock, to whom he had once rendered an important service.

"I'll do what I can for you, Mr. Bramsleigh," said Wenlock, "for I am never forgetful of a past kindness. Now, in the first place, who had an interest in your sister's death?"

"No one that I know of," answered Edgar.

"Nonsense," answered the detective. "For instance, was her life insured?"

"Yes, it was, for two thousand pounds, in favour of her husband," replied Edgar.

"Ah," remarked Wenlock, "and you say that Mr. and Mrs. Waldron didn't live happily?"

"He always treated her badly, but when an old flame of his was left a widow, with ten thousand a year, he was a perfect fiend to her," answered Edgar.

"Well, he can marry her now,—if she'll have him," observed Wenlock. "Do you think I could have a look at the premises?"

"Come along," said Edgar; and the two men made the best of their way to Wensleydale Gardens.

Until the funeral was over, Mr. Waldron had retired to some furnished apartments in Bury Street, taking a few necessaries with him in a portmanteau, for he was a gentleman who loved his ease, and did not care to be put out.

As soon as they entered the house they were met by the dead woman's maid, who had been passionately attached to her mistress. "I am very glad to see you, Mr. Edgar," said she. "I knew you had nothing to do with it, poor dear. Who could have had the heart to kill her?"

"You found her, did you not?" asked Wenlock; "did Mr. Waldron come in immediately afterwards?"

"Yes, now I think of it, he was on me precious sharp," answered the girl, "and said, 'What is the matter with your mistress,' before I had had time to do more than shriek out."

"You didn't see him come in, then?" demanded the detective.

"No," replied the girl; "but he had his latch-key, and could have got into the house at any time."

The detective made no reply, but continued to inspect the room in which the crime had been committed. The drawing-room was entered by a door opening on the principal staircase, and at the further end of it was a side door which led into a passage, on the other side of which was a small room, used by Mr. Waldron as a dressing-room. The detective opened this door, and scrutinised first the walls and then the carpet. All at once he fell upon his hands and knees upon a rug composed of some dark skin, bending so closely over it that his nose almost touched the fur. "Take care where you tread," said he, earnestly, to Edgar; "if I am not mistaken I have found the clue to the murderer's identity. Step over the rug carefully and show me Mr. Waldron's dressing-room.

There were a great number of costly toilet requisites strewn

about,—ivory-backed brushes, silver tweezers, and hand-mirrors set in ivory,—but Wenlock paid no attention to these, being occupied in inspecting a line of boots of every description, which were ranged on a mahogany stand in one corner of the room. Each pair Wenlock took up one by one and carefully inspected, putting them down again with an air of extreme disappointment.

"Had Mr. Waldron no other boots but these?" asked he.

The murdered woman's maid, who had followed them into the room, cast a look upon the regiment of boots and shoes, and answered, "He had on a pair of patent leather boots on the day of the murder, with great ugly buff-coloured tops. I know he changed them, for I noticed that he went away to his lodgings in a pair of shoes, with white spats, and I wondered how he could have the heart to think of changing his boots at such a time."

"You are a sharp girl, my dear," observed the detective, with a pleased look stealing over his countenance. "Always notice things like that and you will get on in the world. Can you lock up this rug for me in some very safe place? You can; very well, then, my dear, do so, and don't let the key out of your possession for anything. That's about all we can do here, Mr. Edgar, so we may as well be off."

"Be off," echoed Edgar Bramsleigh, in an inexpressibly disappointed tone. "Why, I thought you were going to do wonders, and find out everything."

"Patience, sir—patience," observed the detective, as they left the house. "Rome was not built in a day, and for the matter of that I don't suppose anyone ever thought it was."

* * * * * * *

As befitted a recently bereaved husband, Mr. Waldron did not show at his club, or in the more reputable resorts where he was in the habit of being seen; but he was a man of resource, and there were plenty of profligate dens where his presence would excite no remark, a visit to which necessitated late hours the next morning. It was about twelve o'clock on the day after the detective's visit to Wensleydale Gardens that Mr. Waldron's own particular man knocked at his master's door, and, in obedience to a grumbling "Come in," entered the room.

"Get me a brandy and soda," said the reveller; "my mouth seems like a lime-kiln."

As soon as he had finished the cooling draught, Mr.

Waldron, with a friendly curse, asked his man what he wanted, and why he stood staring at him like a stuck pig.

"Please, sir," answered the valet, "did you give any orders to Nethersole about those patent leather boots with buff uppers?"

Mr. Waldron's face turned ghastly pale, and for a moment he was unable to articulate a word.

"Are you mad or drunk?" said he, at last. "I don't know what you mean about Nethersole and boots."

"Why, sir," replied the man respectfully, "after you had left yesterday a man came from Nethersole's, the bootmakers, and said you had ordered him to call for the patent leather boots with the buff uppers, as they pinched you a bit, and you wanted them put on the last. I had a rare hunt for them, but I found them at last doubled up in that little handbag you carried yourself when you left the Gardens, and so, of course, I gave them to him."

"You cursed fool," roared his master, "it is a plant,—a robbery; I never gave any orders. Run round to Nethersole's and inquire."

His manner was so terribly in earnest that the man hastened away without further comment.

In about twenty minutes he returned. His master was dressed and was cramming a quantity of gold and notes into a courier bag.

"Please, sir," said the valet, "Mr. Nethersole says he has not seen you for the last week, and that he sent no man for your boots."

"That will do, get out of this, you idiot!" growled Mr. Waldron; "and if anyone asks for me, I have gone to Brighton, do you hear?"

With hurried steps he descended the stairs, and opened the front door, but started back as he found himself confronted by Wenlock and a couple of constables. "That's your man," said the detective; "make sure of him."

But Mr. Waldron was not to be taken so easily. He dashed upstairs again and re-entered his room, the door of which he locked. "There is no escape that way," exclaimed Wenlock, who had followed him fast, "the back is guarded, you had better give in quietly."

The only answer was the report of a pistol and a heavy fall on the floor within; followed by a deep groan.

. . . . . .

"You see, Mr. Edgar," remarked Wenlock, when he was

discussing the matter some days afterwards, "he evidently struck her down in a moment of passion, and must have stepped in the poor lady's blood as he was making for the hall by the back staircase, and printed off a neat impression of his foot in the rug. He must have noticed that one boot was stained, and changed them before he left the house. The insurance money, and the hope of a rich marriage, must have been the motive. Anyhow, he has cheated the gallows."

"But why did he not burn his boots instead of carrying them about with him?" asked Edgar, innocently.

The detective looked at him compassionately. "You just try and burn a pair of boots in your grate, without anyone noticing it, or leaving any trace, and you'll find your work cut out for you," said he.

HANGED BY THE NECK.

THE GIBBET ON FRAMLEY HEATH.

THERE was a dead silence in the court as old Judge Hargrave slowly assumed the black cap and addressed the prisoner in the dock. There was a certain malicious twinkle in the old man's eyes as he uttered the terrible sentence of the law.

"Prisoner at the bar," said he, "you have been very justly found guilty by the jury of a series of the most audacious highway robberies and burglaries which it has ever been my lot to hear enumerated. Your course of crime has been a long one, but justice has overtaken you at last. The sentence of the court is that you shall be taken to the spot where your last crime was committed—Framley Heath—and that you shall hang by the neck until you are dead, and may the Lord have mercy on your soul!"

A murmur ran through the court as the sentence was pronounced, for it was remembered that on Framley Heath the culprit had stopped Judge Hargrave, as he was driving home from a dinner at Squire Rainford's, and despoiled him of a valuable gold repeater, a diamond ring, and some sixty guineas, the winnings of the evening at whist.

The prisoner did not seem at all impressed by hearing the sentence which remitted the span of his life to a few days, and answered defiantly, "Thank you, my lord, you take advantage of your position, and I can see there is a spice of malice in your manner. However, you have done your worst now, and so I wish you good-bye; but take care, for if there is any truth in a life beyond the grave, I will come back again and pay you what I owe you."

He made a mocking bow, and, turning to the jailor, who stood beside him, was about to quit the dock, when the voice of the judge arrested his progress.

"Stop, prisoner," said he, "I have not yet concluded. Your body will remain suspended in chains upon Framley Heath as a warning to ill-doers like yourself. Now, jailor remove the prisoner to his cell."

Starlight Dick had indeed, as the judge said, had a long career. For nearly four years he had been the terror of the lonely roads and wide heaths of Marlshire, and so expeditious were his movements that he appeared to be endowed with the gift of ubiquity, committing a highway robbery in one place, the gossip concerning which had hardly subsided, when intelligence of a burglary with violence, some twenty miles off, brought his name again before the public. Immunity, however, caused him to grow careless, and at length he was arrested, after a deep carouse, at a lonely alehouse which he was in the habit of frequenting. The robber made a desperate resistance, and mortally wounded one of the thief-takers before he was secured. Numbers, however, prevailed ; and as the assizes were on, his shrift was but a short one.

On the boundaries of Framley Heath, old Simon Drabley, a member of the Society of Friends, occupied a small farm, where he dwelt with his daughter, Rachel, and his sister's son, Obadiah Lockyer. Rachel was a comely lass, and it had been settled that if Squire Rainford, the owner of the farm, would grant a fresh lease, she and her cousin were to be made man and wife.

Simon Drabley had been a witness of one of Starlight Dick's most daring robberies, and with manifest unwillingness had been compelled to give evidence against the prisoner at his trial. He was almost heart-broken when he heard the sentence pronounced, for the tenets he professed were strongly adverse to the infliction of the penalty of death. He did not, therefore, form one of the dense crowd which collected on Framley Heath to witness the final exit of the robber who, for so long a period, had been the terror of the county.

There was not much of the solemnity of death apparent in the crowd. A good deal of horseplay, much smoking, and deep draughts from various bottles, with which the more thoughtful of the spectators had provided themselves, filled up the time, until the sheriffs and their *posse comitiatus* came into sight, escorting the cart in which the doomed man was seated in the company of the chaplain and the hangman.

Starlight Dick had prepared for the final scene of his life after the traditions of his class. He wore a scarlet riding-frock, richly laced with gold, well-fitting leather breeches, and pumps with silver buckles. In one hand he carried a large nosegay, which had been sent to him by one of his admirers.

He seemed totally unconcerned ; and it was only once that his countenance changed, and that was when, casting his eyes

over his shoulder, he became aware of the proximity of the tall gibbet, which cast its black shadow over the heath, and under which a few minutes afterwards the cart drew up.

The final scene of the tragedy was soon over. The executioner pinioned his victim and adjusted the fatal cord round his neck.

Then the doomed man stood up, and, motioning aside the chaplain, who was offering him the consolations of religion, kicked off his pumps with an air of bravado amongst the crowd, and made a signal to the hangman that he was ready.

The cart lumbered heavily away, and in another second the body of the malefactor swung between heaven and earth, his limbs writhing and working in all the convulsions of an agonising death.

For a few seconds the hideous sight acted like a spell of silence upon the crowd; but as the struggles of the robber ceased, and his body hung limp and motionless at the end of the cord, the turmoil broke out again, and oaths and loud speeches filled the air, as they turned away to seek their various domiciles.

The body was left swinging, the wire frame with which it was to be permanently encircled not being ready; and the fixing of which would afford another day's holiday to the rabble, whose pleasure it was to indulge in such gruesome sights.

By twelve o'clock the next day the hangman, with a blacksmith and a small portable forge, followed by a group of eager sight-seers, arrived on Framley Heath, and made their way at once to the spot where the gibbet had been erected. Upon their arrival there, however, exclamations of wonder and alarm rose up on all sides. The tall gibbet was there, and the cord still swung idly in the wind, but the body of the dead robber had disappeared as completely as if his master, the Prince of the Powers of Darkness, had come in the night and carried it away for some unknown purpose.

This, indeed, was the general opinion, for though a strict search was at once instituted, no signs of Starlight Dick could be discovered.

AT DULSTON GAP.

For two whole days the whole district was almost insane with excitement regarding the disappearance of the body of Starlight Dick. The rustics clung to the Satanic suggestion, but the better informed, after the first surprise had died out, began to

believe that the dead robber must have had some friends who had removed the corpse from the gibbet for Christian burial.

A new and inexpressibly strange event, which, however, now took place, afforded a topic for fresh conversation, and added a new terror to those who were compelled to be abroad in the dark hours of the night.

The business of the assize being over, Judge Hargrave went to take a rest at his friend Squire Rainford's, and both gentlemen, being of convivial habits, went over to dine with the mess of the King's Royal Piebalds, which distinguished regiment was quartered at Dulston. After a tolerably wet evening, the squire and judge took leave of their hosts and rolled into the carriage which was to convey them home.

Both gentlemen had taken a fair dose of wine, and the motion of the carriage lulled them in a short time into a comfortable slumber, from which, however, they were aroused by the sudden stopping of the vehicle, and the summons, by no means uncommon in those days, of, "Stand! your money or your life!"

Squire Rainford was the first to rouse himself, and leaning out of the window, saw that the progress of the carriage had been arrested at a point where the road ran between two hills, known in the county as Dulston Gap. The coachman had dropped his reins, and was seated on his box, absolutely petrified with terror, whilst near the window was standing a figure which caused the squire to participate in the agony of mind under which his domestic was suffering. The figure which had stopped the carriage was attired in a scarlet frock richly embroidered with gold lace, and was holding a pistol in its right hand. This sight, however, would not have frightened the stone-hearted squire, who had had many an adventure with knights of the road, had it not been for the fact that the moon, suddenly emerging from behind a cloud, disclosed the lineaments of Starlight Dick, the robber whom the squire had seen executed on Framley Heath a few days before.

"Come," growled the apparition, "out with the shiners; do you think I have come all the way I have for nothing? Down with the rhino, or I'll send a brace of slugs through your skull."

There could be no mistake. The voice that made this imperative demand was the voice of Starlight Dick, and the hand which was extended to receive the money had the identical three-cornered scar upon it which the squire had noticed in court on the day the robber was tried for his life.

Mechanically he thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out his purse, which Dick grasped with a strident laugh of triumph, exclaiming at the same moment, "Now, then, how about the other sleepy-head; wake up, you old dodderer, and hand over."

By this time Judge Hargrave had contrived to arouse himself from the slumber which had been produced by wine and fatigue, and peering over the squire's shoulder, for the first time caught sight of the face of the figure which was making so threatening a demand. The recognition was mutual, and as the judge started backwards, the robber, with a loud oath, discharged his pistol.

Roused from his lethargy of terror by the report of the fire-arm, the coachman gathered up the reins, and with voice and whip urged his horses into a mad gallop, which speedily conveyed the carriage far from the ill-omened Dulston Gap, and never ceased until, panting and exhausted, the animals permitted themselves to be pulled up in front of Rainford Hall.

When the judge was invited to descend from the carriage it was found that he was insensible, for though the bullet had failed to reach its mark, yet the sudden shock had brought on a fit of apoplexy, from which he died in a few hours, without ever recovering his consciousness.

The fact that the ghost of Starlight Dick had appeared, and had, according to promise, settled accounts with Judge Hargrave, spread like wildfire over the county, and caused universal terror and alarm, and this was considerably heightened when other reports came in of meetings with the spectral highwayman on many of the spots which he had been in the habit of frequenting in life.

In each case the apparition had shown no signs of reformation, but had demanded money, with threats of instant death in case of refusal.

People began to be shy of going about alone after nightfall, and the frequenters of the village alehouses would not venture to return home except in parties of twos or threes.

Applications were made to various clergymen to exorcise the evil spirit, and cast it into the Red Sea, which was at that time considered the legitimate limbo for wandering ghosts.

Whether such precautions were adopted or not, however, the spirit of the hanged highwayman still continued its nocturnal and predatory excursions, and it was not until a week after the first appearance of the spectre that the general alarm was dissipated in a very strange and unexpected manner.

A select party of jovial souls were seated over their grog at the "Moon and Seven Stars," in a village situated on the outskirts of Framley Heath, and with every glass seemed less and less disposed to turn their steps homewards.

Just, however, as the landlord was impressing upon them the necessity of turning their steps homewards, the door was flung violently open, and a man, with terror depicted on every lineament of his face, burst into the room, and, with a wild look round, fell senseless on the floor.

"Why, it's Pedlar Joe!" exclaimed the landlord, after they had raised the fainting man from the ground and forced some spirits down his throat. "What ails you, my lad?"

As soon as the affrighted man had recovered his speech, he told them that he had crossed the Heath that night, and that, forgetting all about Starlight Dick, he had passed close to the gibbet, and, to his horror, saw the robber occupying his old place at the end of the cord.

A general murmur of disbelief was heard, but the pedlar was so earnest in his asseverations of the truth of his statement, that at last the party sallied out to decide the question beyond doubt.

On arriving at the gibbet they saw the body of Starlight Dick oscillating gently in the night air, and certainly as dead as a man could be. One curious fact they noticed, and that was that, wherever he had been, he had not performed the journey on foot, for his legs and feet were encased in a pair of horseman's boots, with a glittering pair of spurs buckled thereon.

A PAIR OF GOOD SAMARITANS.

Crowds naturally hastened to Framley Heath to view this strange spectacle, and when the hangman came with his iron cording,—for this time it had been determined that so slippery a customer should not have a second chance of escape,—a fresh and more astounding discovery than ever was made. Not only had Starlight Dick been scientifically hanged, but an inspection of the body showed that he had been most artistically gagged!

The wildest conjectures were hazarded, but no solution of the enigma was arrived at, and the dead robber was left to poison the air, whilst the iron framework in which he was encased creaked and jingled with every breath of wind which swept over Framley Heath.

Squire Rainford was terribly puzzled. Having been present when Judge Hargrave had been frightened into apoplexy by the supposed apparition of the robber, he was naturally extremely desirous of solving the mystery, and sought by every means in his power to obtain some elucidation of it.

Mounted on his steady-going old roadster, he scoured the district far and near, alighting at lonely alehouses, and conversing with tinkers, gipsies, pedlars, and all those whose avocations compelled them to lead a peripatetic life, but in no case could he obtain the information he sought for.

At last this craving for the unriddling of the problem grew so strong that he took a decided step by causing a notice to be put in the county paper, to the effect that he would give a free lease of fifteen years of any of his farms which might be vacant.

Tempting, however, as the offer was, for a whole week it elicited no response, and Squire Rainford once more sank into the lowest depths of despair.

One day, as the squire was seated in his orchard recreating himself with a pipe and a mug of ale, a servant came up to him and informed him that his tenant, Simon Drabley, was desirous of saying a few words to him, and in another moment the Quaker farmer, followed by his nephew, Obadiah Lockyer, made his appearance.

"Well, Simon," said the squire, "what brings you here to-day?"

The farmer slowly unfolded a copy of the county paper, and placing his forefinger on a certain paragraph, asked, "Is this thine, friend Rainford?"

"I put it in, if that is what you mean," returned the squire, "and what is more, I'll stick to my promise; but mind, I must have the fullest information."

"And that I am willing to give thee, friend," returned the Quaker, "but that is on the condition that thee will not use what I tell thee against me and my sister's son, Obadiah Lockyer."

"Why, were you that scoundrel's accomplice?" exclaimed the squire. "I never thought that a sober, peace-walking man like you, Simon, would have a hand in highway robbery."

"Thee goes too quickly," replied Simon, colouring; "I said not that I had, but if thee will give me the required pledge, I will explain all to thee."

Squire Rainford was too eager for the truth to hesitate long, and so he gave the required pledge, and, lighting a fresh pipe, listened to the tale which Simon Drabley poured into his ears.

"When the man of sin, whom thee called Starlight Dick, was tried, I was compelled, much against my will, to be a witness against him, and so it came about that my heart was very sad as I heard him sentenced to death. Upon the day on which he was hung, I and Obadiah had been over in my cart to Whittlestream, and as we were returning over Framley Heath, we heard groans, and on investigating the cause we found that they came from the gibbet, and that the man, Starlight Dick, had been so clumsily hanged that he was still alive, and in his agony moaning for help. I fear, friend Rainford, that Obadiah and I acted contrary to the law, for we cut him down, and, placing him in the bottom of the cart, conveyed him home. When we arrived there, with Rachel's assistance we put him to bed, and for two days lavished every care upon him; but the wicked man was not to be turned from the paths of sin, for when he grew strong he rose up in the night and stole away, taking with him a pair of horseman's boots belonging to Obadiah, and an old pistol, which he used for scaring the birds. Truly the heart of the man was depraved, for we heard that in spite of the warning he had resumed his evil courses again."

"But, hang it, man," exclaimed the squire, as Simon came to a stop, "that is only half the story. I tell you, Master Simon, that you have steered precious close to the wind, and it is lucky for you that I passed my word; but come, out with it, and let us hear the end!"

Simon Drabley looked very foolish, and fidgetted about from one foot to the other, seeming unable or unwilling to continue his recital, whilst the squire looked at him with feelings of intense curiosity.

Obadiah, seeing that his uncle would not continue, took upon himself to interpose.

"Thee will keep the communication secret, friend Rainford," said he.

"You have my word," answered the squire.

"And thee will keep to thy promise about the lease," pressed the young man.

"Good, lad," returned the squire, with a burst of laughter, "always have an eye to business. The lease is safe enough, if you have got the story right."

Thus assured, Obadiah commenced.

"When the man of sin was lying sick in my uncle's house, he must have obtained an inkling where the money was kept, for some nights afterwards I caught him endeavouring to break in and secure our property. He fought like a child of Beelzebub,

but we prevailed against him; and then, seeing that he would never repent, my uncle and I put a gag in his mouth, and, clapping him into the cart, drove over to Framley Heath, and hung him on the gibbet from which we had so foolishly taken him. This time the work was not done in a bungling manner, and Starlight Dick will never trouble Marlshire again, I think."

"Well done, my lad," exclaimed the squire; "you have made up for your first transgression by the good deed you did. By Jupiter, Starlight Dick would have done better had he kept clear of you after his lucky escape. The matter shall remain a secret. The lease you shall have, and when you marry pretty Rachel, remember you ask me to the wedding; and if you permit so frivolous a pastime, I claim the hand of the bride for the first dance."

THE MURDER AT THE MASQUERADE.

The Hilarity Theatre had closed, and the burlesque season for which it was renowned was over. An enterprising manager, however, who had just successfully got rid of a heavy accumulation of debts by the timely assistance of the Court of Bankruptcy, had rented the theatre during the dead season for a low figure, and had been giving a series of entertainments, which had taken the fancy of the public considerably.

These consisted of balls of various kinds,—fancy dress, calico, and others of less marked characteristics; but the glories of these were all to be eclipsed by a masked ball, the announcements of which were placarded over every disposable hoarding in town.

On the appointed evening, a crowd of gay revellers thronged the Royal Hilarity, attired in various quaint and fanciful costumes, but all wearing the customary black mask, concealing the upper portion of the face.

The stage, and the stalls and pit, which had been boarded over, were filled to overflowing, and it was difficult for those who desired to dance to find space for their amusement.

The noise was deafening, laughter, loud conversation, and shrill cries rose up to the gorgeously painted ceiling, from which the electric light shone down clear and cold upon the rabble rout beneath. Order was, however, rigidly maintained, and stalwart myrmidons in the employment of the management promptly repressed the attempts of practical joking which began to show themselves at the commencement of the evening.

For those who did not care to mix with the gay revellers in the promenade, seats had been provided in the dress circle and upper boxes, whilst the select few, who, though willing to witness the antics of the crowd, but desirous of doing so unseen, were permitted to pay an exorbitant sum for a private box, the front of which was carefully shielded by a cunning arrangement of fans.

About eleven o'clock the fun had become fast and furious, for the numerous refreshment bars had not been permitted to

remain unvisited, and the rowdy element which is always to be found at such gatherings began to assert itself.

It was just at this juncture that an official of the theatre, with terror depicted in his pallid features, rushed into the *sanctum*, where the manager, Mr. Levi Manasses, was indulging himself in what he called a glass of "sham."

Mr. Levi Manasses was a little man, with dark, piercing eyes, a protuberant stomach, and the opinion that he was so important a personage that it was impossible for the world to go round without him.

"What do you mean, fellow, by this unwarrantable intrusion?" exclaimed Mr. Levi Manasses, rising from his seat and drawing himself up with an air of offended dignity.

The man endeavoured to gasp out a reply, but was utterly unable to do so—his tongue seemed to cleave to his palate; but suddenly noticing the manager's glass of "sham" standing on the table, he hurriedly grasped it and drained it off at a gulp.

"Is this madness or intoxication?" cried the outraged manager, following up his question by a choice selection from the vocabulary of abuse, in which he was a passed master.

"I beg your pardon, sir," stammered the official, "but I'm hurled so clean of a heap that I don't know whether I'm on my head or my heels. There has been murder done in Box 27."

"Murder! nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Levi Manasses, "as if anyone would presume to commit murder in a theatre under my management, at any rate without consulting me first. You are drunk, I tell you; get out of this, and don't venture to show your face again here."

To what further lengths the managerial wrath might have gone it is difficult to say, had not a helmeted guardian of the law made his appearance and confirmed the official's statement by declaring that a lady had been stabbed in Box 27, and that the surgeon who had examined her declared that life was extinct.

The news of the murder spread like wildfire, and the police had the greatest difficulty in clearing the house.

On enquiry, it was discovered that the murdered lady was a Mrs. Redgrave, the wife of a gentleman holding a good position in a Government office. She had not been married more than four years, and was very beautiful. The murder had been effected by means of one of those dagger-shaped hair pins, which had been driven with great force into the back of her neck while she was bending forward. Medical evidence declared that death must have been instantaneous. The crime

had been discovered by the husband of the murdered lady, who had accompanied her to the theatre, but had left her for half-an-hour, to keep an appointment at his club. He cautioned his wife to keep the door of the box locked, and believed that she would be in perfect security. On his return, however, he could obtain no answer to his knocks, and upon the box-keeper opening the door for him, a hideous sight met their eyes. Mrs. Redgrave was leaning forward, her head resting on the velvet ledge of the box, perfectly dead. The arrangement of the fans had concealed her from the dancers, and the revelling must have gone on for some time with the stony face of the dead woman staring down upon the merry-makers.

What could have been the motive? Certainly not robbery, for a handsome diamond necklace was round the deceased lady's neck, whilst her wrists were encircled with costly bands made of the same precious stones.

There were, in addition, several valuable rings on her fingers, and a purse containing a couple of sovereigns and some silver was found in her pocket.

Some persons who occupied the adjoining box deposed that they heard voices in the one where the murder had been committed, but whether it was before or after Mr. Redgrave's departure they were unable to say. The conversation seemed to be earnestly carried on, but it did not appear like quarrelling. In the end, an open verdict was returned, and the mystery of the murder at the masquerade seemed as if it would join that long list of riddles to which no answer has ever been discovered.

Clement Lalworth, the brother of the deceased lady, had been very active in making enquiries, and had had frequent interviews with Detective-Sergeant M'Cann, in whose hands the case had been placed. He more than once informed the detective that his sister and her husband did not live on good terms, and that he believed Redgrave knew more about the matter than anyone else.

This caused the detective to make enquiries at Mr. Redgrave's house, but they assured him that the pair lived in the most perfect harmony, and that the only time there had been a difference between them was when Mr. Redgrave forbade his wife to receive Clement Lalworth, as he had heard much to his discredit. Persuing his enquiries, Sergeant M'Cann found that though Mr. Redgrave had stated that when he left his wife it was to keep an appointment at his club, yet the hall porter

of that establishment positively denied that he had seen that gentleman on the night in question,—indeed that he had not visited the club for nearly four days previous to that date.

Sergeant M'Cann thought this excessively strange, and asked Clement Lalworth if he had any idea where his brother-in-law could have been during the time Mrs. Redgrave was left alone in the box.

"Was she left alone at all?" asked Clement, with a meaning look. "Is it not a great deal more likely that he only went away for a few moments and then returned and butchered my poor sister?"

"But the motive, Mr. Lalworth, the motive," persisted the detective; "surely you, who knew the parties so well, can find some motive for such a crime being committed?"

"I tell you that he was tired of her," answered Clement; "besides, I dare say the fellow was in difficulties, and there was an insurance of fifteen hundred pounds on my poor sister's life."

Fortified by this intelligence, the detective made further enquiries, the only result of which was that Mr. Redgrave did not owe a penny, and that though he had certainly drawn the amount for which his wife's life was insured, he had handed the whole sum over to his wife's mother untouched.

"Can't you find out where your brother-in-law did go to on the night of the masked ball?" asked the detective, as he was sitting in the bar of a sporting public-house with Clement Lalworth.

"How the devil should I be able to find out that?" asked the young man, in a quarrelsome tone. "I thought it was the business of you detectives to make wonderful discoveries, and here you are bowled out at the first step."

The detective looked curiously at Clement Lalworth, and then answered carelessly, "Well, I suppose I must try; at any rate I can reckon on your help?"

"Of course you can," answered Clement; "but I confess I am getting a little sick of all this kind of hole and corner work. Can we not apply for a warrant for Redgrave's arrest. I tell you he did the trick, and no mistake."

M'Cann made more enquiries, and the further he dived into the matter, the more damning was the evidence against Mr. Redgrave. The officials who were in charge of the various points of exit of the Hilarity Theatre on the night of the murder, declared that they had not seen him pass out or return, though, of course, he might have done so, and one of the

stalwart gentlemen appointed by Mr. Levi Manasses to keep order, declared that he believed he had seen Mr. Redgrave wandering about the promenade as if in quest of some one.

Things certainly looked very suspicious, and yet M'Cann knew that under the present circumstances it would be useless to apply for a warrant.

One day he was walking through Leicester Square with Clement Lalworth, when a dapper little Frenchman took off his hat to the latter, with a "Bon jour, M. Clements."

"You have some foreign acquaintance," remarked the detective, looking curiously at Lalworth, who had flushed scarlet and returned the Frenchman's greeting with a sulky nod.

"An infernal keeper of a Paris gambling house," exclaimed Lalworth. "I wonder what he is doing over here. He wouldn't have been so fast in claiming my acquaintance if he had known that I was walking with a 'tec."

"Oh, he keeps a gambling house, does he?" remarked the detective, "and he called you Mr. Clements."

"Of course one doesn't give one's right name in such places," answered Lalworth, carelessly, and so the matter dropped.

When, however, the detective was alone he began to think over the meeting. "Curious," thought he, "very curious indeed. I meet Monsieur Etienne Dupont, a most respectable Parisian jeweller, with a grand shop in the Rue de la Paix, and Master Lalworth, whom, by-the-bye, he addressed as Monsieur Clements, tells me that my respectable Parisian tradesman is a gambling-house keeper. Strange, very strange. I know what business M. Dupont is over about, and I'll have a talk with him before he leaves. Then I think I will have a talk with Mr. Redgrave, but first there is a little domiciliary visit which I must pay, and I think to-day will be as suitable as any other."

. . . . . .

For a young man who mixed with rather a sporting set of Bohemians, Clement Lalworth occupied some rather seedy lodgings in the neighbourhood of Stoke-Newington, at the house of a Mrs. Briarley, who was not always satisfied with her lodger in pecuniary transactions.

One day a thundering rat-tat came to her door, and anticipating a tenant for the drawing-rooms, which were to let, she hurried upstairs, and, as she opened the door, confronted a country-looking middle-aged gentleman, attired in a pepper and salt suit and drab gaiters.

"Mr. Clement Lalworth within?" asked he.

"No, he ain't," said the disappointed landlady, "nor likely to be until three or four in the morning, and then he'll come in and wake us all up; I hate such goings on."

"Dear me," remarked the visitor, "this is very sad. I have come a long way to see him, and, if you will allow me, will sit down and rest in his room on the chance of his coming back earlier than you anticipate."

"I can't allow no strangers in any lodger's rooms," observed the landlady, suspiciously.

"Ah, pardon me," returned the visitor; "how foolish I am. Of course you do not know me, and are acting quite properly. Has he never mentioned to you his wealthy uncle, Mr. Lalworth of Dullborough?"

"He have," answered the landlady, "and a score of times I've taken letters directed to him to the post, but the old gent don't send him no money, or if he do, I don't see the colour of it."

"Ah, well, I am Mr. Lalworth of Dullborough," said the visitor, "and I have come up to town to see what can be done for this scapegrace nephew of mine, who, by the way, I dare say, owes you a small account."

"Well, there is a matter of £2 12s. 9d.," admitted Mrs. Briarley, drawing a crumpled sheet of paper from her pocket; "but it don't matter,—leastways, not to-day."

"Excuse me," returned the visitor, taking it from the rather dirty finger and thumb between which it was held. "This shall be seen to at once. I happen to know my nephew is coming back early, and so I must again ask you to let me sit down. I am glad my nephew has so cautious a landlady, though I question if I am prudent in allowing him to remain in the house with one so good-looking."

"There, go away with you," said Mrs. Briarley, highly pleased with the compliment. "You'll find Mr. Lalworth's rooms on the second floor front. I'm very busy, so perhaps, as how you'll excuse my showing you up."

"Do not mention it," returned the country gentleman, as, with a light step, he ascended the stairs.

. . . . . .

It was a bank holiday, and the office of the Green Seal, where Mr. Redgrave was deputy-assistant secretary, was closed. Mr. Redgrave himself was seated in his library, gloomily musing over the past. The terrible uncertainty with regard to the murderer of his wife was preying upon his mind, and a hideous fear, which he strove in vain to put aside, was gradually creep-

ing over him. As he sat plunged in this profound reverie a servant came in and said that a man desired to speak to him.

Mr. Redgrave had ordered one of the office messengers to bring up his despatch box, and naturally supposing that this was his visitor, he ordered him to be shown up.

To his extreme surprise a stranger entered the room—a stranger, and yet his face appeared perfectly familiar.

"I want to have a talk with you, Mr. Redgrave," said the man. "It is rather an out of the way manner of doing things, but I think I am more than likely to get at the truth by such means than by any other. I am Sergeant M'Cann of the Detective Department."

"Ah, now I recollect where I have seen your face," answered Mr. Redgrave. "You are the man who has been following me about for the past few days."

"You have noticed that, have you," said M'Cann. "Well, Mr. Redgrave, I think I can get to the bottom of this mystery if you will answer me one or two questions."

"I will do the best I can, sergeant," answered Mr. Redgrave.

"First, then," began the detective, "why did you not go to your club, as you said you did, on the night of the murder?"

"Yes, that is number one," returned Mr. Redgrave; "go on."

"Secondly," resumed M'Cann, "who were you trying to find in the theatre, for I am informed you did not leave it?"

"Who was I trying to find?" repeated the bereaved husband. "Well, have you any more questions?"

"Thirdly," said the sergeant, raising his forefinger impressively, "why were the diamond ornaments which the poor lady wore on the night of her murder false ones?"

The last shaft penetrated the armour of impassability in which Mr. Redgrave had encased himself. His face flushed, and he started to his feet, exclaiming, "The stones false! Then there *was* a motive for the murder."

"Will you answer my questions?" asked the detective.

"Certainly," responded Mr. Redgrave, "if you will answer one of mine. Who fabricated the false jewellery?"

"Monsieur Etienne Dupont, of the Rue de la Paix, Paris; but I don't know how he managed it, unless he had the ornaments in his possession."

"They were a gift to my poor wife from her godmother, Lady Clermiton," replied Mr. Redgrave. "She was very proud of them, and had had them photographed in their natural size."

"That explains a good deal," said M'Cann; "and now, sir, will you kindly answer my questions?"

"I did not go to the club because I had to meet someone," replied Mr. Redgrave, slowly; "and as that person requested me not to say a word to my wife, I made my engagement at the club a pretext for leaving her."

"And where were you to meet this person?" pursued M'Cann.

"At Staples & Lakes' refreshment bar in the promenade," answered the official.

"Of course you did not do so?" observed M'Cann.

"You are right, though I cannot imagine from where you derived your knowledge," said Mr. Redgrave. "I waited three quarters of an hour in vain; but as the appointment was made for the purpose of a debt being paid me, I was not surprised. I then returned to the box, and—and—" Mr. Redgrave could not finish his speech, but covered his face with his hands and gave way to a burst of emotion.

"Thank you, sir," remarked the detective. "I won't trouble you any more. I can lay my hand on the right party now. In the meantime here are the real diamonds, which I will leave in your hands if you will sign this receipt."

Mr. Redgrave mechanically did so, and the detective, taking a small parcel from his pocket, placed it on the table and took his leave.

* * * * * * *

Mr. Clement Lalworth had quitted Mrs. Briarley's lodgings with some precipitation—in such a hurry, indeed, that he had quite omitted to settle his bill, and had only removed such of his belongings as he could carry away in a Gladstone bag.

He was now residing in a small room at Deptford, and had considerably altered in appearance. His long, fair moustache had been ruthlessly removed, and his hair stained to a much darker colour; besides this he wore blue glasses, and called himself Mr. Jenkins. He was sitting one evening smoking a pipe, when a tap came at the door, and before he could exclaim, "Come in," it was pushed open, and the figure of Sergeant M'Cann appeared on the threshold.

"Good evening, Mr. Lalworth," said the detective, pleasantly; "it is not kind of you to hide yourself like this from old friends. I have been looking for you ever since you left Stoke-Newington, the day after your uncle's visit."

There was a mocking smile on his lip as he uttered these

words, and Clement Lalworth, who saw that the game was up, made a dash for the door.

In an instant the two men were twined together in a deadly struggle, sending the furniture spinning in every direction, and crashing against the walls, in their efforts to obtain the mastery. M'Cann, however, was accustomed to such encounters, and soon had Lalworth on his back, and after a little more struggling, succeeded in handcuffing him. "There you are, safe and sound," said he, panting with his exertions, "and while I get my breath, I'll just tell you how I managed to put salt on your tail. When *your uncle* called at Mrs. Briarley's, he found in your room a set of diamond ornaments, and a black velvet half-mask. M. Dupont recognised these diamonds, having made a similar set in paste from photographs for a M. Clements, whom he had seen walking with me in Leicester Square. You paid him one hundred and fifty pounds for the job. You had borrowed one hundred and sixty-five pounds from Mr. Redgrave, and made an appointment to meet him and pay him at the masked ball, an appointment which you did not keep, as during the time he was waiting for you you were occupied in murdering your sister and changing the real diamonds for the sham ones. You did not venture to realise on your booty until the matter had blown over, but when you found that they had been abstracted from your rooms you thought it best to make a bolt. You tried hard to hang your brother-in-law, Mr. Lalworth, but have only succeeded in putting a rope round your own neck."

Sergeant M'Cann was right, for Clement Lalworth was convicted of the murder of his sister, and before the sentence of the law was carried into execution, made a full confession of his crime.

THE MYSTERY OF ESSEX STAIRS;

OR, THE LETTERS ON THE FLAGSTONE.

It was a bright moonlight night, the stars were shining clearly, and scarcely a breath of wind was stirring, as Police Constable X924 walked slowly down Essex Street, whistling to himself softly as he did so. His tour of duty was nearly over, and he was feeding his mind on the anticipations of a snug supper, with a comfortable pipe afterwards, when he heard a deep groan and a heavy fall, succeeded almost immediately by the rapid patter of footsteps, as though someone had made away at the top of his speed. These sounds appeared to come from the foot of the flight of stone steps, with which Essex Street terminates at one end. "There's something wrong there," muttered the constable, as he abruptly ceased his whistling and quickened his pace, descending the timeworn stairs with as much celerity as was compatible with safety.

When, however, he reached the bottom, he could not at first see anything to account for the sounds which had alarmed him, until glancing into the dark street on the right of the steps, he saw a shapeless mass extended on the pavement, whilst a smaller object close by was struggling with quick, uncertain movements. Just as the constable flashed his bull's-eye on the recumbent figure, and had discovered that the struggling creature was a black poodle, the creature, by a sudden exertion, succeeded in emancipating itself, and, with a bark of triumph, tore away round the corner and along the embankment in the direction of the Temple Station.

"It ain't no good my following that cretur," thought Constable X924; "there seems to me to be something more important here."

The constable was right, for the recumbent form was that of a man lying with his face in a pool of blood, which was still flowing from a terrible wound in the neck.

Constable X924 was a prudent man, and had an intense horror of responsibility, and therefore the shrill notes of his whistle soon brought a couple of his comrades upon the scene.

They raised up the fallen man, who was still breathing, but it was evident to all the constables that the little life which still lingered in him would speedily have fled. There was a terrified look in his eyes, and his lips moved eagerly, though no sound issued from between them. Robbery had evidently been the object of the murder, for coat and waistcoat were torn open, and no sign of a watch-chain was visible.

"He's going," remarked one of the new arrivals. "Where's the nearest doctor?"

"In Norfolk Street," answered Constable X924; "if you fellows will stand by I will run and fetch him."

"Stop!" exclaimed the third man, as the constable was about to make a start; "look here, the poor fellow has been trying to write something on the pavement in his blood."

The light of the lantern showed the letters "J. A." roughly scrawled in the crimson fluid, then came something like an incomplete half circle, and after that a dash, as if the writer's strength had failed.

"Is that meant for the name of the fellow that hurt you?" demanded one of the constables, bending over the wounded man, who made a movement of his hand, which might have been taken either for assent or negation, and then lapsed into a state of unconsciousness.

Police Constable X924 hurried off, but the medical man was unfortunately not at home, and the policeman was standing disconsolately on the embankment, wondering what he should do next, when he was startled by seeing the identical black poodle, which had escaped from the grasp of the injured man, jumping and whining round a figure seated upon one of the seats.

The constable at once walked up to the bench, and perceived that the person with whom the dog appeared to be on such intimate terms was a young man, with a fair moustache and a pleasant cast of features. He was very shabbily dressed, and had on a much worn light overcoat.

"That dog seems precious fond of you," remarked Constable X924, addressing the young man.

"He ought to be," was the reply, "for he has been with me five years, and shared good and evil fortune with me, principally the latter, during that period."

"Oh, and so the dog is yours, is he?" asked the constable, a little suspiciously.

"Of course he is," replied the young man; "but fool that I am, what am I thinking of? Besotted fool that I am, I have

parted with him, and my curse upon the juggling fiend who tempted me. Scrub, where is your new master?"

"That is a question you will have to answer, as well as to account for those blood stains on the sleeve of your coat," replied the constable.

"So I will, whenever you like," returned the late master of Scrub, "but not now; any time after nine this morning I will come where you like, but I have an appointment at that hour, and am only resting here because I have no money to pay for a bed."

"Gammon," replied the constable; "a fine chance I should have of meeting you again if I let you out of my sight. Come along," and he seized him roughly by the collar.

The young man made a violent resistance, but he was weak and unable to cope with the stalwart constable, and though Scrub utterly ruined Constable X. 924's pantaloons by a sudden attack on his rear, both he and his late master were eventually overpowered and marched off to the police station.

When the prisoner, who gave the name of John Maynard, was brought before the magistrate, the case seemed very black against him, and he was remanded for a week.

When he was brought up again, the coroner's inquest had delivered a verdict of wilful murder against him, and a well-known barrister had been instructed by the Treasury to prosecute.

The prisoner, John Maynard, who was in a terribly depressed state of mind, would have been without legal assistance had not a young barrister, who had become interested in the case, volunteered his services. Arthur Medlecott had been called to the bar about three years; he was a quiet, studious young man, and though he had not as yet received many briefs, had won golden opinions in those cases in which he had been engaged.

Something seemed to tell him that there was some mystery in this affair, and the further he went into it the deeper interest he felt. The unhappy man who had been found at the foot of Essex Stairs, and who had died whilst being conveyed to the hospital, was identified as a certain Reuben Blatchley, a betting man, who bore rather an equivocal reputation. There was no money save a few coppers found on the body, though it was well known the deceased had been in possession of a comparatively large sum of money before his death.

Before obtaining the assistance of the young barrister, the prisoner had made a statement to the following effect. His

name was John Maynard, aged twenty-eight, and he earned his living by exhibiting his trained dog, Scrub, at various music-halls of inferior stamp. For the past two years his mother had been suffering from a painful and incurable disease, the expense of which took away every farthing he made. He had an acquaintance with the dead man, Reuben Blatchley, who had for some months been desirous of purchasing the poodle Scrub. At length, crushed down by adverse circumstances, Maynard had consented to sell the faithful animal for ten pounds, which sum Blatchley had paid him at a public-house on the night of the murder. He confessed that he had been very angry at the time, and had accused the deceased of putting pressure upon him, but he had no hand in his death. He had parted with him outside the door of the public-house, and after placing Scrub's lead in his hand, had seen him turn toward the Temple, with the dog whining and struggling to get free. Police Constable James Morgan, X924, deposed to finding the dying man, and also to seeing the dog escape. He arrested the prisoner, who made considerable resistance.

Cross-examined by Mr. Medlecott. "Did he not say that he would come at ten o'clock and explain matters?"

Witness, smiling, "Yes, but I did not put any faith in him."

Inspector Frederick Hailes deposed that the prisoner had been brought to the police station, and that he noticed blood on his coat sleeves. Two five-pound notes were found in his pocket, each of which had two small punctures as though made by the point of a pin.

Question by counsel for the defence. "Did not the prisoner say that he was waiting for daylight in order to take the money, which was the price of his dog, to his mother?"

Answer. "He did make such a statement."

Gregory Marlton, publican, deposed that the prisoner and deceased were in his house on the night of the murder, and that prisoner was speaking very angrily to the dead man, but at the time he did not pay much attention, as he was accustomed to hear people quarrel. He heard deceased call the prisoner "Jack." Deceased had given him a fifty-pound note early in the day, requesting him to get it changed. He would swear to the notes found on the prisoner as forming a portion of the money he had handed to deceased, because he had pinned the notes together, and the holes were still apparent. Prisoner had a black poodle with him, and he and deceased left the house together.

By Mr. Medlecott. "Did you hear anything said about the sale of a dog?"

Witness. "No, I did not."

"Did deceased pay prisoner any money?"

"Not as far as I saw; he bundled the notes into his breast pocket and went on jawing. He was a little gone, I think."

"And you will swear that he and the prisoner went out together?"

"Yes, I will swear to that."

William Hallock was next sworn. He said that he was at the "Bunch of Grapes" on the night in question, and heard the prisoner call deceased a mean-spirited devil, who would take advantage of a man's necessities, and that he would repent of it sooner than he fancied. Prisoner's manner was threatening, but deceased was conciliatory, and called him "Jack, old fellow," offering to stand him a drink. He saw deceased receive money from the landlord. He left the house before deceased or prisoner. He had no acquaintance with either of them.

By Mr. Medlecott. "What is your business?"

Witness. "I haven't any; I do odd jobs."

"Have you ever been in trouble?"

"I got into a mess a year ago about a gentleman's watch, but it was all a mistake."

"However, mistake or not, you got six months' hard labour."

"Yes; the witnesses were all prejudiced; it was a cruel shame."

"You were drinking in the 'Bunch of Grapes;' where did you get your money from?"

The witness, insolently. "I don't see that I have any call to tell you that, gov'nor."

"When the clerk gave you the testament you put out your wrong hand; are you left-handed?"

"There is no harm if I am, is there?"

"I ask you again if you are left-handed?"

Witness. "Well, for the matter of that, I am."

Police Constable Robert Dicker, Z. 834, who had been summoned to the spot, deposed that he had discovered the handwriting on the flagstone, and said that the facsimile of it produced in court was perfectly correct.

By Mr. Medlecott. "You assisted in placing the deceased on the ambulance for conveyance to the hospital?"

Answer. "I did."

"Did you notice his hands?"

Witness. "I do not understand what you mean."

Mr. Medlecott. "Were there any blood stains upon them?"

Witness. "No, they were perfectly clean."

Mr. Medlecott. "If there was no stain on his fingers how do you account for his having written the letters 'J. A.' in his blood?"

Witness, hesitatingly. "I cannot account for it at all."

Dr. Andrew Macalister, M.D., was then called, and deposed that he was house-surgeon at St. Gengulphus' Hospital, and that the deceased when brought in was quite dead. The witness then proceeded to state that death had been caused by an incised wound in the throat, and that it could not have been self-inflicted.

By Mr. Medlecott. "Would it have been possible for the deceased to have written the letters which have been produced in court after having received a mortal wound?"

Dr. Macalister. "Quite possible, though I do not think, after such a shock to the system as deceased received, he would have had sufficient presence of mind to have given such a clue to his murderer."

No further evidence was brought forward on behalf of the prosecution, and the magistrate was about to commit the prisoner for trial at the approaching sessions, when Mr. Medlecott interposed, saying that he had further evidence which he wished to bring forward for the defence.

Peter Romney, of Beech Place, Peckham, deposed that he was well acquainted with the deceased, and acted as his "penciller" at all race meetings.

The magistrate. "What do you mean by 'penciller'?"

The witness. "His clerk, your worship. I entered the bets he made, and kept his accounts generally. He had plenty of money, but used to drink a bit, at times."

The magistrate. "Really, Mr. Medlecott, I cannot see that this evidence has any bearing on the case."

Mr. Medlecott. "One moment, sir, and I think you will see that I am not wasting the time of the court."

To the witness. "Had you any particular reason for acting as clerk to the murdered man?"

Witness, with a laugh. "He had a precious good reason for engaging me, for if it had been to save his life, he couldn't have written a single letter of the alphabet."

Sensation in the court.

Mr. Medlecott. "Thank you, that will do. Please call Mr. Erasmus Urswick."

Erasmus Urswick stepped into the witness box, and made the following statement. "I am a professional expert in handwriting, and I have examined the facsimile of the marks made in blood on the flagstone, which were supplied to me by the police authorities. The letters 'J. A.,' and the unfinished semi-circle, have certainly been traced by someone using their left hand; of this there can be no doubt—"

The magistrate. "I should really be unwilling, Mr. Urswick, to challenge the professional opinion of a gentleman who has now such a reputation as you have, but do you not think that you are going a little too far?"

Mr. Urswick. "In what way, your worship?"

The magistrate. "In so decidedly stating that the writing must have been executed with the left hand."

Mr. Urswick. "The caligraphy of the right hand differs in the most wonderful and marked manner, and there are very few persons whose handwritings are alike; but in the course of my experience, I have invariably found that the writing executed by the left hand has almost invariably the same characteristics. I produce, for the inspection of the court, a sheet of paper, upon which I have obtained a dozen copies of the letters 'J. A.' Not copies, for they have not seen the facsimiles in the hands of the police. They were all effected in the same manner,—by dipping the forefinger in blacking,—and your worship will observe the marked resemblance between the various attempts. I am now going to make a further statement, which may seem even more incredible than my first one, and that is, that if the letters were written with the left hand, they were never written by the dead man."

The magistrate. "That is a bold assertion, Mr. Urswick, and I shall be glad to hear how you will prove it."

"I was brought up, your worship, for the medical profession, and took my degree in due course, but I, after a time, abandoned it—I am sure Dr. Macalister will pardon me—for a less precarious position. I examined the left hand of the murdered man, and I find that the middle finger is wanting, doubtless the result of some accident, and the forefinger and the one next to it are stiff and unbendable, so that by no possibility could they have been used to inscribe the letters 'J. A.' I appeal to Dr. Macalister to know whether I am, or am not, right."

Dr. Macalister, rising and bowing. "You are perfectly right, Mr. Urswick."

Renewed sensation in the court.

The magistrate. "Then what is your argument, Mr. Medlecott?"

Mr. Medlecott. "That it would be absurd to suppose that my client would have inscribed the two first letters of his Christian name had he been the actual murderer, and that 'J. A.' was written by the real criminal in order to throw the blame upon an innocent party."

"You forget the blood upon the coat, and the two five-pound notes, which have been identified as having been in possession of the deceased on the night of the murder, and which were found upon the prisoner."

"The notes, my client has asserted, were given him in payment for the poodle, which the police constable, who discovered the body, saw escaping from the dying man's grasp; and the blood is easily accounted for by a wound which the dog received when the murderer made his first attack, and with which he would have stained his master's coat in his joy at finding him again."

"Let the dog be brought into court," said the magistrate; "I should like to examine the wound myself."

Within five minutes after this order had been given, a sudden tumult arose at the door of the court. The barking and snarling of a dog was mingled with the oaths and vociferations of a man, and a confused murmur from the officials.

Above it all rose the tones of a man, pronouncing these words, clearly and distinctly: "You infernal brute, are you not content with having bitten my leg nearly through for the accidental slash I gave you at the foot of Essex Street, but you must make for me again."

"There is the end of my case for the defence, your worship," remarked Mr. Medlecott. "Scrub, the poodle, has put in the finishing link of evidence, and if you want the real murderer, why, there he stands, self-confessed, in the person of William Hallock, the left-handed villain who, with his fingers dipped in his victim's blood, traced the lying letters which have almost thrust an innocent man's neck into the hangman's noose."

Taken by surprise, and feeling that there was no retracting the admission he had made, Hallock sulkily confessed his crime. The remainder of the stolen notes were found in the lining of his coat, and Scrub's mark was visible on the calf of his leg. He confessed that he had seen the notes handed over to Blatchley and heard the quarrel between the two men. The idea of the crime had flashed suddenly upon him, and waiting outside, he had dogged the betting man, after he had

parted with Maynard, until a convenient spot was reached, when, springing upon him, he had cut his throat with a razor which he had in his pocket. The dog had received a chance cut in the struggle, and had retaliated after the manner of his kind with his teeth. He had then robbed the dying man, and traced the letters "J. A." on the flagstone near, as if the expiring efforts of the victim had been to give a clue to his murderer. He had then run off at full speed and hurled the bloodstained weapon into the Thames.

In due time William Hallock expiated his crime on the gallows, whilst John Maynard, whom Scrub had quietly followed out of court, was lucky enough to obtain a good engagement for his canine *protégé* at one of the leading music halls, where his sensational story became known through the medium of the press, and so to supply his mother in her last days with every comfort.

AN ENTHUSIASTIC OFFICIAL.

M. Achille Peyraud, the Prefect of Police in the town of Serpente-sur-Moire, was one of the most enthusiastic men of his profession, and eagerly longed for a chance of distinguishing himself by having some atrocious criminal to deal with,—one whose deeds would form the topic of conversation far and wide. It seemed, however, as if his expectations would never be gratified, for nothing but misdemeanours of a trivial character seemed rife in Serpente-sur-Moire. Cases of assault, drunkenness, and petty thefts were common enough; but the inhabitants abstained from committing murder, forgery on a large scale, or arson, in a manner that was terribly aggravating to a man of M. Peyraud's temperament.

"Look here, Derval," said he one day, addressing a subordinate officer in whom he placed much confidence, "what use am I in the world? My talents are entirely thrown away, and a mere *sergent de ville* could look after Serpente-sur-Moire quite as well as I could. There are no openings, Derval—no openings; and my name will never be classed with men in the same position as myself, who have leaped into notoriety by their detection of crime."

"You must not be downhearted, monsieur," replied Derval, soothingly. "Remember how cleverly you traced the man who shot the Comte de Portel's gamekeeper some five years ago."

"Bah! a mere bagatelle; a child could have done the same," returned M. Peyraud, despondingly. "I tell you, Derval, that I am dying from inaction, and that unless I have the dealing with some great and mysterious crime, my brain will give way."

"And yet, monsieur," suggested Derval, "there is another side to the question which you should look at. Will not the authorities consider the absence of crime in the town entirely due to the care and vigilance of the Prefect of Police?"

"That is not the kind of reputation I want," exclaimed M. Peyraud, with an angry stamp of his foot. "But there! no one understands me, and I shall go down to my grave without a soul on earth comprehending my feelings."

Derval saw that he was on the wrong tack, and as speedily as possible made an excuse to leave the presence of his superior.

No greater contrast could be found than that offered by the appearance of the two men. M. Peyraud was tall and muscular, with bright piercing eyes, which never appeared to be at rest, and a sallow, not to say bilious, complexion ; whilst Derval was stout and broad shouldered, with a jovial expression of face, and a merry laugh in which there was something extremely captivating.

The year was drawing to a close, and the daylight had entirely disappeared by five o'clock, so that some of the narrow, ill-lighted streets of Serpente-sur-Moire were almost in a state of total darkness.

It was on one of these evenings that M. Peyraud entered the Prefecture and asked for Derval.

"I have not seen him since two o'clock to-day," replied the subordinate to whom this question was addressed. "I thought monsieur had despatched him on some errand."

M. Peyraud merely shrugged his shoulders in reply, and telling his *sergent de ville* to accompany him, was about to set out on one of his usual rounds, when a woman, with terror depicted on her face, rushed into the office.

"Oh, monsieur," she cried, "such a terrible thing has happened ! Poor old Daddy Thelou has been found murdered in the Rue Chatte qui Boite."

"Murdered ! Nonsense," returned the Prefect; "lying drunk on the road, I expect. People do not commit murders in Serpente-sur-Moire."

"He is dead, sure enough," answered the woman. "At least, so Dr. Baudricourt says ; he has been stabbed, and is lying in a dark corner in a pool of blood."

Without further words, M. Peyraud hurried on to the scene of the crime, and found the woman's statement to be perfectly correct. Daddy Thelou was an old man of harmless and inoffensive life, a little addicted to taking an extra glass now and then, but beyond that, of blameless character. He did no work, but lived on a small annuity which had been left him by a gentleman in whose service he had been. The poor old fellow had evidently been stabbed from behind, and the doctor asserted that death must have been instantaneous. There were no signs of a struggle, no one had heard of the deceased having had a quarrel with anyone, and the whole affair was wrapped in mystery.

And now M. Peyraud was, indeed, in his element. Day and

night he attended at the Prefecture for the purpose of receiving reports; he scoured the town and its environs, and made domiciliary visits to houses, the inmates of which did not bear the best of characters; but all in vain, for no trace of the assassins of the old man could be discovered.

"Where were you on the night of the murder?" asked the Prefect of Derval, who was alone with him in his private office. "You are always out of the way when you would be of service."

"Why, you know you told me to watch the old quarry pit in the road to Merlonne," replied Derval, in tones of some surprise. "You said you had heard that there was a chance of an attempt being made to conceal some stolen property there."

"Did anyone see you on duty there?" asked M. Peyraud.

"You told me to be careful," replied the man; "and I do not believe anyone saw me go or return."

M. Peyraud seemed much relieved by this news, and shortly afterwards dismissed his subordinate.

After the inquiry regarding the death of Daddy Thelou had been protracted for some days, the inhabitants of Serpente-sur-Moire were astonished at hearing of the arrest of the police agent, Paul Derval, on the charge of having murdered Anatole Thelou.

The accused man strongly protested his innocence, and alleged that at the time the crime was committed he had been despatched by his chief to watch a deserted stone quarry on the road to Merlonne, where it was suspected that some stolen property was going to be concealed.

M. Peyraud, however, declared that he had given no such order; and it would have gone hard with Derval, at whose lodgings a dagger-knife was found, such as might have been used in the commission of the crime, had it not been for the evidence of three lads who had been out faggot-stealing on the night in question.

These urchins deposed that, seeing the police agent secrete himself near the old quarry, they had imagined that he was after them, and had therefore kept a strict watch on Derval until they had seen him quit his hiding place and return home.

This evidence, which proved a complete *alibi*, caused Derval's release; though M. Peyraud put as many obstacles in the way as he could.

Derval took this behaviour of his superior in high dudgeon, and, resigning his situation, left Serpente-sur-Moire, complaining very bitterly of the treatment which he had received.

Before doing so, however, he had a long interview with the

Prefect; and rather bitter words were exchanged between the official and his ex-subordinate.

"You did your best to put my head under the knife of the guillotine," remarked Derval; "and believe me, M. Peyraud, it is a thing which I shall not forget."

"I did my duty; and I still believe that you are the assassin," returned Peyraud, speaking in a highly excited manner. "All that evidence of the lads was got up, and you have robbed me of the honour I should have reaped by discovering the author of the crime."

"You think more of your own glory than the life of a poor fellow like me," answered Derval. "How could you reconcile it to your conscience if you one day discovered that an innocent man had been executed through your instrumentality?"

"Your innocence indeed!" sneered the Prefect. "I do not believe in it; and one day the whole truth will come out."

Paul Derval gazed fixedly into the official's eyes.

"Yes," replied he slowly, "some day the truth *will* come out, and that some day will come round much sooner than you expect, M. Peyraud."

For a moment the Prefect's eyes met those of the ex-detective firmly enough, but then they sank, and, with a muttered imprecation on the man's insolence, he turned away, and terminated the conversation.

And now, as if to make up for his failure, M. Achille Peyraud became more busy than ever. Belated wanderers in the streets met the Prefect at all hours, muffled in his cloak, and slinking round dark corners as if he expected to come suddenly upon some criminal engaged in his murderous work.

Upon these occasions he seldom returned more than a monosyllabic answer to friendly greetings, and, keeping close under the shadow of the walls, dived away down the first narrow street or alley which offered itself.

"Diantre, my good friend," remarked Gaudron, the commercial traveller for the well-known wine merchants, Ponson & Terrail, to his companion, Rallier, the tanner, as the pair were enjoying a friendly game of billiards, "this is a well-watched town. I met our good Prefect again last night wandering about the streets as if the whole safety of the town depended upon his unaided exertions."

"He is a good boy," returned Rallier, as he bent over the table to execute a more than usually difficult cannon, "but I don't like too much zeal. Why can't he leave the watching of the town to those who are paid to do it? Why, it is only two

or three nights ago that he pounced out on pretty Therese Duplan as she was going down the Rue Lapin Rouge, and half-frightened the girl out of her wits. She swears she saw something bright in his hand, and screamed. Fortunately I was standing at my door and ran up, when M. Peyraud made off, muttering something which I could not catch."

"You live in the Rue Lapin Rouge, do you not?" remarked the commercial traveller, chalking the tip of his cue.

"Of course I do," answered the tanner.

"And pray, what does pretty Therese Duplan do down there in the evening?" again questioned the traveller, laying his finger upon his nose. "Fi donc, my friend, I fear you are a sad dog."

The two men laughed, and, as the game went on, talked upon other subjects than M. Achille Peyraud and his mania for perambulating the streets at midnight.

The lodging which poor old Daddy Thelou had occupied, prior to his death, was a kind of lean-to, which had been built against the side of a tall house let out in tenements. It had no communication with the house itself, and consisted of one large room, and a smaller one, which the old man used as a kitchen and store-room for wood and charcoal. This had a small window in it, while the living-room had a door which opened directly into the street.

Since the murder no one had cared to occupy the rooms, for it had got abroad that the shadowy and indistinct form of Thelou was at times seen entering the doorway, and that a pale face had more than once been visible at the window of the smaller room.

The street in which the unpretending little dwelling was situated was very quiet, and after eleven o'clock at night was almost entirely deserted, except when a couple of *sergeants de ville* passed down it in their nightly rounds, or the cloaked figure of the Prefect crept mysteriously along under cover of the shadows cast by the walls, and halted for a few minutes at the spot where the body of the murdered man had first been discovered.

Some little excitement, therefore, was caused in the quarter when an old woman and her son, who, from the appearance of their tattered clothes and worn shoes, had evidently tramped from some far distant town, after a long search for suitable lodgings, agreed to become the tenants of the lean-to.

The woman was a miserable-looking old crone of about seventy years of age. Her long grey hair was tied up under

what had once been a smart Madras handkerchief, but the bright colours of which had now almost disappeared under the combined effects of exposure and dirt. She seemed to be almost bent double with age and infirmity, and supported her tottering steps by the aid of a crutch-handled staff.

The son was an active, robust young fellow of about six-and twenty, with a complexion as swarthy as that of a gipsy, black hair, a moustache, and a sullen expression of face.

After some hesitation the landlord, on finding from the police that the papers were all right, agreed to receive the suspicious-looking pair as tenants, stipulating, however, that a week's rent should be paid in advance.

After much grumbling on the part of the old woman, and a volley of abuse from the son, this condition was complied with, and the key was handed over in due form.

"There was a murder done here, old un," remarked the young man, with a malevolent look at his mother; "and if thee keep on aggravating me there may be a second before you think."

"They say that Satan is always dodging about the place where a deed of blood has been committed," answered the old woman, "so have a care, my lad, or he may take thee off in one of your drunken fits."

With a savage oath the young man thrust his hands into his pockets and strolled away in the direction of the nearest wine-shop, whilst his mother entered the house and busied herself in restoring, or attempting to restore, something like order to the few articles of furniture which the miserable lodging boasted.

As they had begun, so this unpleasant pair of lodgers continued to act. Though they did nothing for their livelihood, yet they appeared to be not without money. The son got drunk every night at the wine-shop, and would then stagger home, where he usually found his mother huddled up before the fire, smoking a pipe and drinking coarse brandy, of which she too seemed immoderately fond.

On these occasions fierce quarrels took place, followed very frequently by scenes of violence. At first the neighbours interfered, under the apprehension that the young man would fatally injure his mother; but they soon found out that she was a perfect virago, and could handle her crutch-stick so vigorously that the son usually thought it best to slink off to the inner room, where, stretched on a heap of straw and covered with a couple of dirty blankets, he slept off his drunken fit, and by the next morning was ready for another bout.

The Prefect of Police had become strangely interested in this disreputable couple. More than once he had stood in the doorway talking to the old crone, with a curious puzzled expression on his face, as if he felt that she was somehow or other known to him, and he was trying, though vainly, to set his memory to work.

The old woman answered his questions as rudely as she dared, whilst her son openly told the Prefect that, as long as they kept clear of the law and paid their way, the magistrates, with all their *sergents de ville* and police agents, might go to Beelzebub for all he cared.

"Take care, young man," returned the Prefect, eyeing him angrily, and holding up a menacing finger—"take care. I hear that you frequently raise your hand against your aged mother; remember acts like that will bring you under the hands of the correctional police, and I promise you that they will not deal too leniently with you."

"Bah!" answered the young man, insolently. "Go to others with your moralities. She has lifted her hand often enough against me when I was a helpless child, so what I give her now is only her due. The old witch struck me a blow last night, and it was lucky for her that I was too drunk to get hold of her, or I would have had her life."

"Silence, young man," broke in the Prefect, severely; "do you not know that unconsidered words such as these may bring your head under the knife of the guillotine?"

"I mock at you and your guillotine," answered the young man, savagely. "Come, you have no business here; be off and catch your murderers, though, from all accounts, you have a knack of letting them slip through your fingers."

The Prefect's face flushed scarlet; for a moment he seemed to be on the brink of making an angry reply, but, restraining himself by a powerful effort, he turned away, apparently unconscious of a peal of insolent laughter which issued from the throats of mother and son.

* . . . . . .

Some three or four evenings after the last visit of M. Achille Peyraud, a quarrel of a more savage description than usual broke out between the mother and son.

Shrieks of "Help! Murder!" resounded from the miserable lodging, and the neighbours, rushing in, found the old woman grasping her son's thick black hair with one hand, whilst with the other she held his wrist and kept back the sharp-pointed knife with which he endeavoured to reach her throat.

Violent force was necessary in order to separate the combatants, and when this was effected the young man shook his clenched fist at his mother, and swore that he would have her life.

"I'm not afraid of him," remarked the old woman, smoothing her ruffled plumes. "And I think you might find something better to do than to come interfering between mother and son. The lad's a good lad enough if you would only leave him alone. Go and tell that fine Prefect, who is always sneaking about here; he'll be pleased to hear my boy and I have been at it again."

The young man had by this time staggered off to his heap of straw, upon which he had fallen in a state of comatose intoxication, and one of the spectators of the domestic tempest accepted the old woman's words literally, and, hastening to the Prefect's house, told him what had taken place.

M. Achille Peyraud listened attentively, thanked his informant, but told him that he saw no cause for interference.

"They are a bad lot," he said, "and I wish that they were out of the town; but all I can say is, I will call round to-morrow, when the fellow is sober, and remonstrate with him."

The feeble glimmer of an oil lamp was dimly visible through the dirty window panes of the hovel in the Rue Chatte qui Boite and through the badly-fitting door could be heard the stertorous snoring of the drunken man. The old crone had retired to bed, and looked more like a bundle of rags than a human form. All was still in the street, for the police had made their round some quarter of an hour before.

A dark figure, muffled in a cloak, stole softly along, taking advantage of any projecting corner, and any dark shadow which might serve to veil its progress. It paused before the door, and, bending forwards, listened. Apparently satisfied, the figure pushed at the door, which yielded without a sound, and entered the house.

A glance into the inner room showed the form of the drunken man snoring upon the straw, and utterly unconscious of all that was going on. Then the figure turned to the bed, and drawing a long, slender knife from its bosom, passed its hand over the sleeping form, as though to select a place for a mortal blow. The glittering blade was raised on high, when, with a yell of exultation, the old woman sprang from her couch and grasped the intending assassin in a pair of muscular arms. Taken by surprise, the murderer lost his balance, and he and the woman rolled upon the floor.

"Quick, Jules, quick!" cried the intended victim. "Get hold of his arm. He has put his confounded bodkin through my shoulder already. Quick, I say, I am getting faint!"

The seemingly drunken man had started from his couch of straw at the first sound of the struggle, and, making his appearance upon the scene, caught the intruder by the throat with one hand, and tore the weapon from him with the other.

"Bind his hands," said the old woman, as, rising from the floor, she cast aside her headgear and wig, revealing by the action the features of Paul Derval, the ex-police agent of Serpente-sur-Moire.

"Aha, M. le Prefect!" said he, bending over the intruder, who was now tightly secured. "You were anxious for a murder. Was it you who killed poor Daddy Thelou, and tried to put the crime on me, and, failing that, made sure that a son who was always quarrelling with his mother would certainly be guillotined if she was found murdered? Monster, I laid the trap, and have caught you! In your lust for distinction you have not hesitated to spill blood, and to consign an innocent man to the scaffold.

As he spoke a violent contortion passed over M. Peyraud's face, his limbs began to quiver, and the foam to gather in great flakes upon his lips. He was in an epileptic fit. When a medical examination was made, the doctors certified that he must have been insane for some time, and that the idea of a well-traced murder case and the price he would receive had turned his brain; and that, had it not been for a faint suspicion which had caused Paul Derval to so cleverly carry out his scheme, the mad Prefect might have committed fresh crime in the peaceful town of Serpente-sur-Moire.

"AN EVIL LIVER."

THE opinion of society at large was that the marriage was a most suitable one in every way, and everyone predicted a happy conclusion to a wedding in which Cupid and Plutus had equal shares.

Both Mr. St. Leger and Mrs. Carruthers held a fairly good position, and each had money — though, of course, Mrs. Carruthers' small income of fifteen hundred a year seemed insignificant in comparison with the thousands Mr. St. Leger was in the habit of spending annually on his house, his horses, and equipages, his shooting-box in the Highlands, his marine residence at Cowes, and in a thousand other expenses, which, though they would have been extravagant in some, were only the merest necessaries of life to a merchant prince like Mr. St. Leger. And yet, though very wealthy, Mr. St. Leger was not exactly a merchant prince; indeed, it would have been a little difficult to say what he was, or rather what he was not.

He had an office in the city, not one of those flashy new ones,—all mahogany, plate-glass, and kamptulicon, with a dozen clerks in it, each assisting the other to do nothing,—but a sober, old-fashioned, dark den, in which gas had to be burnt in the daytime nearly all the year round, with a venerable clerk in it, whose white hair and tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles would have inspired confidence in the bosom of the most sceptical.

Nothing seemed too big for Mr. St. Leger to touch, and if his health had only been good, his friends declared that the business of the greatest city magnates would have appeared but a trifle when compared to that of Mr. St. Leger. Not that he was always ill, but he suffered from some mysterious complication of the liver, which sometimes kept him a prisoner in the house for days together. During these attacks he was never seen by the servants, his wants being attended to by his confidential valet, who crept about the house like a cat, and astonished and terrified the other domestics by his whispered confidences regarding his master's malady.

The house which Mr. St. Leger occupied was a large one

situated at one of the corners of Mandeville Square. It had originally been built as a residence for a medical man, and during his acute symptoms Mr. St. Leger occupied a room on the ground floor, which projected from the rest of the house, and had been intended for a surgery. It had a private entrance-hall and a private door of its own, and access was obtained to it from round the corner.

When Mr. St. Leger announced his intention of marrying Mrs. Carruthers, the widow of the late governor of one of our smaller colonial dominions, all the world applauded the step he was taking. "For," remarked society, with the usual affectation of sympathy, "he will now have someone to look after his health; and, besides, with a wife at the head of his table, he will be able to entertain more profusely than he has already done."

So Mr. St. Leger and Mrs. Carruthers were made man and wife. A bishop condescended to tie the sacred knot, and a distinguished company attended the ceremony, and afterwards partook of a profuse breakfast at a west-end hotel, and with many a good wish and lavish showers of rice, speeded the happy pair on their way to Brighton, the bridegroom's avocations not permitting him to go further away from town, even for so important an occasion as the honeymoon trip. In due time the happy pair returned to town, and Mr. St. Leger began to celebrate his enrolment on the Order of Hymen by a series of magnificent entertainments, each succeeding one appearing to outdo its predecessor in lavish profusement.

But here again Mr. St. Leger's mysterious liver persecuted him. Too often, in the midst of his most brilliant entertainments, he would press his hand to his side, and, stammering out a few words of apology to his guests, would be compelled to seek the privacy of his own room on the ground floor, where his faithful valet administered to him such remedies as experience had told him were most efficacious.

At first Mrs. St. Leger was greatly alarmed at these symptoms, and wished to nurse her husband herself; but a few words from Mr. St. Leger, and a peremptory injunction from his medical adviser—a blunt old army surgeon, who had long ago retired from the service, and from all practice save looking occasionally after his private friends—induced her to commit the care of Mr. St. Leger's liver entirely to the doctor and the valet. So, after a time, the guests who frequented Mr. St. Leger's establishment grew quite accustomed to their host's absence, and hardly remembered to inquire after his health.

About this period the neighbourhood of Mandeville Square was the scene of a series of daring and successful burglaries. The thieves were evidently well acquainted with the premises they invaded, and rarely failed in securing a large and valuable booty, either in plate or jewels. Occasionally a valuable picture would be cut from its frame, showing that these predatory gentlemen had some acquaintance with the value of art productions. Nothing that could be converted into cash came amiss to these light-fingered gentry, and more than one wealthy dame had cause to lament the loss of her costly furs, which had gone off to keep company with her diamonds and her husband's ancestral plate. The police had, in spite of the most strenuous exertions, entirely failed to catch these clever artists at work, and had been equally unsuccessful in their endeavours to trace any of the missing property.

One evening the St. Legers had issued cards of invitation for a fancy dress ball, which was entirely to eclipse all their preceding entertainments. Mrs. St. Leger, blazing with diamonds, was attired in a nondescript garb, entirely of her own designing, which she stated was the costume of the Queen of Sheba; whilst her husband, in spite of all his remonstrances, was forced to don the uniform of an officer of police of the time of Ivan the Terrible of Russia. On this evening, odd to say, Mr. St. Leger experienced no return of his liver complaint, but mingled freely with his visitors, retiring every now and then with one or other of his guests, who desired to consult him on an affair of importance, for, like a wise man, he never permitted pleasure to interfere with business. His confidential valet, with a face expressive of the deepest anxiety, hovered within easy distance of his master, ready at the first unfavourable symptom to bear him away to the safe seclusion of his private apartments. None, however, showed themselves on this auspicious evening, and the company were assembled at supper in an immense pavilion, which had been erected on the leads at the back of the house, when one of the footmen glided up to his master's side at the head of the table, and whispered a few words in his ear.

"What!" exclaimed Mr. St. Leger, in tones of supreme wonderment. "Surely there is some mistake here."

The man repeated his communication.

"The police!" said Mr. St. Leger, in a loud tone, so as to be easily heard by all the assembled guests. "Pooh, pooh! Ah, I see it is a joke! Rather hard, though, to disturb us at

supper; but let them come in. The chief magistrate of Moscow is ready to receive them."

As he uttered the command, Mr. St. Leger threw himself into an imposing attitude, which drew a murmur of applause from the assembled guests. In a few moments, however, a veritable sergeant of police made his way through the fantastically attired throng, whilst the helmeted heads of one or two constables could be detected peeping through the velvet curtains which veiled the doorway.

"Well, worthy sergeant," said Mr. St. Leger, still continuing to act up to his assumed character, "what news of the good city of Moscow? But methinks you are strangely apparalled for a nadsdirath."

"I don't know anything about nasty rats, sir," returned the sergeant, rather severely; "but your house has been broken into, and, for all I know, the thieves may be in it at this very moment."

"Then it is not a joke, sergeant?" asked Mr. St. Leger, throwing aside frivolity and becoming in a moment the keen man of business.

"I hope you may find that it is one," was the unexpected reply; "but your side door has been forced, and the constable on the beat found it open. He reported the case, and I have left a couple of my men on the look-out whilst I came round to the front to ask permission to search the house."

"This is a very serious matter," answered Mr. St. Leger, "for I have a great deal of very valuable property in my private room, to which the side door leads. Of course, sergeant, you can search the house; but I must beg, ladies and gentlemen, that you will not disturb yourselves. Continue your supper as if nothing had occurred. Pray do not allow a trifle of this description to interrupt a pleasant evening. If you will kindly excuse me for a brief period, I will accompany the police in their search of the premises, and return to you again in as short a time as I possibly can."

As he uttered these words he rose from his seat, as if his intention was to accompany the sergeant and constables in the proposed domiciliary visit; but the confidential valet interposed.

"Have you the key of the door which opens from the hall into your private room, sir?" asked he.

"Certainly I have," returned Mr. St. Leger. "How else could I get through, for the door closes with a spring?"

"And here is my key, sir," continued the man, "and I defy them either to pick the lock or break through the door, which is

an iron fire-proof one, so that if thieves are anywhere in the house, they must be in your private room; and as the police are on guard outside, if they have not already made their escape, they are finely trapped."

"Well," said Mr. St. Leger, "it is but a step from here to the door. Let us go and see." And leaving the room, he led the way to the door, followed by the sergeant, the constables, and half-a-dozen of the guests who had volunteered to see the affair to the end.

They found the door intact, and throwing it open, stepped right into Mr. St. Leger's private room, but there were no robbers there. The chamber, which was luxuriously furnished as a library, was in a sad state of disorder. The oaken cupboards, which lined one side of the room, had been broken open, and the papers, of which their contents chiefly consisted, were strewn over the floor. In one corner stood a ponderous safe, constructed of some shining metal, and towards this Mr. St. Leger advanced, with an expression of intense anxiety upon his face.

"I expect the fellows wanted to get at the contents of this," remarked he. "Look at the scratches about the keyhole, and where they have used the jemmy, as they call it. No, no, my fine fellows; I didn't give a heap of money for a safe which a burglar could open. They would have had a nice prize, indeed, if they had succeeded. See here!"

And taking a key from his pocket, and turning it first to the left and then to the right, pressing down a button here and drawing a bolt there, the heavy doors opened slowly and noiselessly, and disclosed the interior of the safe.

"The burglars must have had correct information," continued the master of the house, with a smile; "for yesterday I drew from the bank a sum of six thousand pounds, with which I wanted to complete a certain transaction to-morrow." And as he spoke he exhibited a bundle of bank-notes. "Besides," he continued, "I usually take care of such portions of my wife's jewellery as are not in wear," pointing at the same time to a quantity of Morocco jewel-cases on one of the top shelves. "Well, there was nothing else to steal in the room, so I fear Messieurs les Voleurs have had their trouble for nothing, and so we may as well close our treasure-house." Once again the various bolts and buttons obeyed the magic of his fingers, and the massive doors closed as noiselessly as they had opened. "Well, sergeant," continued Mr. St. Leger, "there is no occasion for any further stay on your part. Thanks very

much for your watchfulness. Come, gentlemen, let us rejoin our friends."

After a few words the sergeant departed, taking with him a handsome gratuity from Mr. St. Leger for his trouble.

Nothing could have been a greater success than the concluding portion of the evening, which this unexpected *contre-temps* had seriously threatened. The temporary check seemed only to have given an extra zest to the enjoyment, and the wonders of Mr. St. Leger's safe, and the discomfiture of the band of burglars, was the theme of conversation upon all sides, and many were the congratulations addressed to the host upon the foresight he had displayed in becoming the possessor of so safe a receptacle.

The burglaries in the neighbourhood, however, still continued. House after house was entered and plundered, with apparent impunity, and, as in the former instances, the police were entirely at fault. One day a wealthy widow, who resided at Mandeville Square, called upon Mr. St. Leger, and begged him, as a personal favour, to lock up her valuable jewels in his wonderful safe, as she was leaving home for a few weeks, and had more confidence in the security of the wonderful mechanical invention she had heard of than in the old-fashioned strong-room of her bankers. Mr. St. Leger raised many objections, but at last he yielded, and the widow's jewellery was consigned to the custody of the safe. This was not the only application he received as to the custodianship of valuable property; and, as he laughingly said, that having complied in one instance, he could not refuse in another. The safe began to be filled to overflowing with articles of great intrinsic value.

In spite of his apparent restoration to health on the night of the fancy dress ball, Mr. St. Leger had several further attacks from his old enemy, and both his medical adviser and his confidential valet often spent the night in the private room of the invalid. One day urgent business called Mr. St. Leger away to the north of England. Such absences on his part were not uncommon, and his wife was beginning to grow quite accustomed to them. The night after his departure, however, she was aroused from her slumber by a loud knocking at the front door, and an alarmed servant told her that a policeman wanted to see her most urgently. Hastily huddling on a few clothes, she descended to the dining-room, where the constable was waiting for her.

"Sorry to trouble, ma'am," said he, civilly, "but I should be much obliged if you would come over to the police station

to identify someone there, who, we think, was connected with the attempted burglary here some few weeks ago."

"But I don't know what you mean. Who can I identify?" said poor Mrs. St. Leger. "I did not see any of the burglars."

"If you will please come over, ma'am," persisted the man, still speaking with perfect civility, "we shall be much obliged. We think we have got a clue, and do not want to lose any more time. I have a cab at the door, which will whisk you over in no time."

After raising a few more objections, Mrs. St. Leger yielded, and after stipulating that her maid should be permitted to accompany her, dressed herself and entered the cab, the constable taking his seat on the box beside the driver.

It was not a very long drive to the police station, and on her arrival there, Mrs. St. Leger was courteously received by the inspector on duty.

"Rather a painful business, madam," said he, "but we wish to lose no time. Two men have been taken in the act of committing a burglary, and a constable has been mortally wounded by one of them whilst attempting to effect a capture. Will you see if you can recognise them? they shall be brought before you separately. Step this way, if you please."

Passively Mrs. St. Leger permitted herself to be led through the office, across a yard, and into a cell, where a policeman was keeping guard over a prostrate body, the face of which was covered by a cloth. The inspector stepped forward and raised it, and Mrs. St. Leger, with a faint shriek, recognised the features of her husband's confidential valet.

"Is he dead?" asked she, faintly, as she gazed on the motionless figure which lay before her.

"Yes, madam," answered the inspector. "He fell off the roof of a house in Campfield Crescent and broke his neck, having previously fired at and wounded the constable who was in pursuit of him. "Now, will you come and see the other prisoner?"

"Is he—is he like this?" faltered Mrs. St. Leger, turning away from the ghastly sight before her.

"Oh, no, madam; except a wipe over the head with a staff, he is all alive," was the reply.

Prepared as she was for the strangest sights, Mrs. St. Leger was hardly surprised in recognising in the other prisoner her husband's medical attendant, as, with a blood-stained bandage round his temples, he was brought into her presence.

"But this is Dr. Forbes," objected she, "an ex-army surgeon, and a very old friend of my husband!"

"I can't help that, madam," returned the inspector. "He was with the other man on the roof of the house, and nearly slipped through our fingers into the bargain. When do you think Mr. St. Leger will be back?"

"He told me to expect him on Thursday."

"And this is Tuesday," said the inspector, thoughtfully. "Do you know where to write to him?"

"He told me his address would be the Queen's Hotel, Manchester."

"Ah, very well; I'll not detain you any longer. I will wire to him. Very sorry indeed to have troubled you, but you see the matter was urgent."

Mrs. St. Leger was terribly upset. The day was just beginning to dawn, and she felt that she could not endure the stifling interior of a four-wheeled cab; so, instructing her maid to drive home, she herself determined to see if a walk would not cool her fevered brain. As she made her way through the deserted squares and passed the long lines of houses, the inmates of which were all wrapped in slumber, she could not help wondering what Mr. St. Leger would do, when he again suffered from a fresh attack of his liver complaint, without the advice of his doctor or the services of his confidential valet. How on earth could Dr. Forbes, whom she had always looked upon as the height of respectability, have become connected with a burglarious entry into a dwelling-house, for it was with this crime that the inspector had informed her he would be charged? Torturing her brain with these questions, she found herself in close proximity to the house in Mandeville Square, and as she came down the street in which the side door was situated leading to her husband's private room, she perceived, to her surprise and terror, a rough-looking figure standing before it, inserting a key in the lock.

For an instant an overpowering feeling of fear paralysed her; then, nerving herself for the struggle, she ran swiftly forward and laid her hand upon the man's arm, just as he was about to pass through the door, which he had by this time succeeded in opening.

With an oath he turned sharply round, dipping his hand into his pocket as he did so, and, with a sickening sensation of terror, the unhappy woman recognised beneath the coarse cap drawn closely over the forehead, the well-known features of her husband, Mr. St. Leger!

He recognised her almost at the same moment, and, seizing her by the arm, dragged her roughly inside the house. Even in the midst of all her terror she noticed that, though he appeared to be in a hurry, he closed the door very softly, as if he feared to make any unnecessary noise.

As she entered the room she sank half-fainting upon a couch; but Mr. St. Leger was in no patient mood, and, filling a glass with water from a crystal jug which stood upon the table, he dashed the contents into her face, and sternly asked what she had been doing out of the house at that hour, and why she had been spying upon him.

The sudden contact with the icy fluid saved her from the feeling of deadly faintness which was creeping over her. She felt that she was on the eve of the revelation of some terrible mystery; but in spite of all her efforts her tongue refused to perform its duty, and it was not until her husband had repeated his question in a loud tone of concentrated wrath, that she found strength to reply. Then, in her agony of terror, she told him all, her summons by the police, her visit to the station, and her recognition of the dead man and the doctor.

For an instant he remained silent, eyeing her keenly with a glance in which anger and disbelief were apparent, and then broke the silence, speaking in the same subdued tone, as though fearful of being overheard.

"Is that all?" asked he, sternly.

"Yes; I do not recollect any more," said she.

"Was any mention made of me?" asked Mr. St. Leger.

"Yes, now I think of it, he asked me where you were, and when you were expected back, and I told him that you were expected back on Thursday," replied the terrified woman.

"Do they suspect anything, I wonder?" said Mr. St. Leger, half to himself. "At any rate, I have time to act in. Sit there, and do not move or speak."

A cold chill of despair spread over Mrs. St. Leger's frame; she felt that in some way or other her husband was connected with the terrible sight she had witnessed at the police station, and she obeyed his roughly-spoken mandate without a word of remonstrance. In an incredibly short space of time Mr. St. Leger had changed his rough clothes for a suit of tweed, had folded up the others, and placed them at the bottom of a portmanteau; a few, quick strokes of the razor deprived him of his moustache and long silky whiskers, so that when he turned again to his wife she almost shrieked at the sudden alteration in his appearance. Then, opening the safe, he took

from a drawer in it a bundle of notes, and emptied the contents of a number of jewel-cases into a travelling-bag, which he also took from the safe.

"Luckily I cleared off most of the others some time ago," muttered he. "It's a risk taking these, but I can't bear to leave them behind; and curse those fools for trying the game when I was not at hand to direct them. Forbes will swing to a certainty, and it serves him right. Now listen to me," he added, turning to his wife, "and do not let a word of what I am going to say escape you. Walk to the front door, as you have arranged. When it is opened go straight up to your room and wait there for the inevitable. I am sorry I got you into this scrape, but you will find your fortune intact."

He ceased speaking, and putting on a pair of smoke-coloured glasses, noiselessly opened the door and peeped out cautiously.

"Oh, John," cried his wife, earnestly, "what is all this? Who are you?"

"The police reports in the daily papers will tell you that fast enough," returned he. "But I have no time; my safety depends upon my speed."

Mrs. St. Leger staggered rather than walked round to the front door, and rang the bell, as her husband had ordered her.

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As Mr. St. Leger had prophesied, the daily papers gave the unhappy woman the fullest information regarding her husband. Mr. St. Leger's business was simply burglary, and in it he was ably assisted by two confederates, one of whom passed as his doctor, and the other as his valet, so that their meetings might give rise to no suspicion. As for the liver-complaint, it was all assumed, and unkind people asserted that it was put on for the purpose of enabling him to make free with other people's chests, and that he was a "liver" at their expense. In spite of the most strenuous efforts of the police, Mr. St. Leger got clear away with an immense amount of valuable plunder, which he had taken the precaution to place at different times in various secure spots, and it is needless to say that with him disappeared all the valuables which had been deposited with him for security by his friends during the burglar's scare.

Forbes was sentenced to penal servitude for life, and, in spite of every inducement, refused to give any information which might lead to the arrest of his fellow criminal. Poor

Mrs. St. Leger, overwhelmed with shame at the shocking exposure, changed her name and retired to a remote part of the country, where she lived in solitude, every moment of her life being haunted by the dread of the reappearance of the terrible Mr. St. Leger, or of being recognised by someone as the wife of the man with the liver-complaint.

AN AMERICAN DUEL.

THE old German town of Heidelberg has been for many years celebrated for its university, though the branches of knowledge acquired by many of its students seem too often to be confined to beer-drinking and duelling.

Fortunately, however, both of these are of a peculiarly mild sort, the German beer not being renowned for its strength and potency, whilst the combatants in a students' duel are so padded and protected that a slight incision in the tip of the nose is frequently the only amount of damage done.

Scenes, however, of a darker kind sometimes occur, when the more violent passions of human nature are aroused, and then the harmless duello is not sufficient to satisfy the rancorous hatred of the disputants.

Max Rechstab and Heinrich Lowenstein were fellow-students at the University during the same year, and for a brief period were fast friends, until the usual element of discord came between them in the shape of Ottilia von Goldberg.

Max Rechstab was a Swabian by birth, a slight, fair man, very studious, and no patron of athletic sports. He did not frequent the various meetings of the other students, and when he was not engaged with his books, he would sit upon one of the benches of the public promenade, the stem of a large china-bowled pipe between his lips, indulging in daydreams, amongst which the fair face of Ottilia von Goldberg formed no inconsiderable feature.

Heinrich Lowenstein, on the other hand, was a tall, powerful young man, an athlete, a swordsman, and a frequenter of all the students' amusements. In spite, however, of this apparent dissimilarity of disposition, a feeling of friendship had sprung up between the two young men, and Heinrich, who was a general favourite, was often laughed at by his comrades for spending so much of his time with that crabbed bookworm, Max Rechstab.

Heinrich, however, would not be turned against his friend, and the friendship of the two young men continued, until Ottilia von Goldberg appeared in the quaint old German city.

Ottilia, the daughter of the Count von Goldberg, was one of the most beautiful women of the day. Tall and upright as a dart, with a flowing wealth of hair of the genuine Titian red bronze, her appearance would have excited admiration anywhere, and how much more so in a city crowded with young men, nearly all of whom were ready at once to fall victims to the tender passion.

But in addition to personal attractions, Ottilia had other gifts. She had studied deeply, was a proficient in classical lore, spoke three modern languages with ease and fluency, modelled in clay with great skill, and had a voice which, like that of Saint Cecilia of old, might have drawn down the very angels from the heavens above.

Her father, the Count, had recently been left some house property in the town, which required a good deal of looking after, and he had therefore taken up his residence there for a time. Heinrich Lowenstein was the son of an old friend of the Count's, and consequently obtained the *entrée* to his house. With all the confidence of youthful friendship, he introduced his friend Max to the domestic circle of the Goldbergs, and the consequence was that the studious Max fell as deeply in love with the fair Ottilia as his introducer had done before him.

"Ottilia," said Heinrich, as he and the beautiful girl were seated alone in the Count's drawing-room, "do you know that I am half afraid of you, for I think you must be possessed of powers which do not belong to this world."

"What do you mean?" asked Ottilia, negligently toying with the handle of a fan which lay beside her. "You may intend to be complimentary, but you are rather enigmatical."

"I mean," returned Heinrich, gaily, "that you have drawn the recluse from his books, and made a heart, which preferred to be as cold as a stone, melt before your charms. In a word, Max Rechstab is madly in love with you."

Ottilia gave a slight shudder. "I guessed as much," said she; "but believe me, I am not flattered. There is something about the young man I do not like, and I wish you had never brought him to our house. Besides, he ought to be told that we are engaged; it is unfair to him to keep the matter a secret."

"You take the matter too seriously, my dear Ottilia," answered the student. "This is Max's first attack of love, and he has got it rather seriously; but, believe me, he will get over it."

"Love is too serious a matter to be trifled with," replied the sentimental German. "Your friend, Mr. Rechstab, has a strong and determined will, or I am much mistaken in my estimate of him."

"I dare say you are right," returned the enamoured Heinrich, "but we have not met to-day to talk about him. You will come to the ball at the Museum, of course, to-night?"

"Do you really wish me to be there?" asked Ottilia, fixing her lustrous eyes full upon his face.

Heinrich made the usual lover-like reply, and then the conversation turned upon the one topic which filled their young hearts—the date of their approaching marriage.

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The great room at the Museum, which was specially devoted to music and dancing was almost filled to overflowing, so much so that but little space was left for the waltzers. The scene was a very gay one, the toilettes of the ladies, and the uniforms of some officers from Mannheim, gave light and colour to the crowd, which moved ceaselessly round the great hall.

The students were there in great numbers, and a good deal of surprise was expressed when the figure of Max Rechstab was observed, leaning against one of the door posts, with a dark frown clouding his brow.

Ottillia was without contradiction unanimously voted the belle of the ball, and near was her the devoted Heinrich, who scarcely left her side for a moment. A friend, however, at last came up to him and earnestly begged him to come and be introduced to his mother, who had only arrived in Heidelberg that morning. This was a request which it was impossible for the student to refuse, and with a promise to be back shortly, he took the arm of his friend and disappeared in the throng.

Scarcely had he done so than Max was at Ottilia's side, and without a moment's pause, poured out a frenzied declaration of love.

"You have made a mistake, Mr. Rechstab," answered Ottilia, coldly, "and when you hear that I am engaged to your friend, Mr. Lowenstein, I am sure you will be sorry for having given vent to your feelings in this manner."

The announcement for the moment struck the student dumb, but in another instant he burst forth into a torrent of angry words, abusing Ottilia and Heinrich for having fooled and deceived him.

"You are forgetting yourself," answered Ottilia, as she rose from her chair, with a flush of anger upon her cheeks. "You

had better not let my father or Mr. Lowenstein hear you talk thus."

"I shall speak as I like of a false friend and a coquettish woman," retorted Max, "and you *shall* hear all that I have to say." As he spoke, he laid his hand upon her arm, but scarcely had he done so than he was hurled so violently aside that he staggered back, and, unable to retain his balance, fell heavily upon the polished floor; and when he recovered his feet, the first sight which met his eyes was the angry face of his late friend, Heinrich Lowenstein, turned upon him with a mingled look of surprise and rage.

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The morning after the ball, Heinrich was seated, smoking, in his room, meditating over the events of the past evening, and confessing how right Ottilia had been in her estimate of Max Rechstab's character.

"Come in," exclaimed he, as a knock sounded on the panels of the door, and two students entered, with whom he had scarcely any acquaintance.

"We have come," said the elder of the two, "on the part of Max Rechstab, the man you so grossly insulted last night."

"Grossly insulted!" repeated Heinrich; "do you know the provocation?"

"We are not here to discuss that matter with you," answered the other second, "though we will do so with any friends with whom you may put us in communication."

"Your principal, then, demands satisfaction?" asked Heinrich.

"He does," said the student who had first spoken—"full and immediate satisfaction."

"There is no need to refer you to my friends," replied Heinrich. "I have had some experience in such matters, and if you will tell me what he requires, I will make the necessary arrangements."

"He requires," answered the student, "a full and ample apology from you, dictated by himself, to be published in the newspapers, and a promise, in writing, from you that you will renounce the hand of the Fraulein Ottilia von Goldberg."

Heinrich laughed scornfully.

"Is there anything else that he requires?" asked he; "and failing that he requires satisfaction. Well, though I, as the challenged party, have the choice of weapons, I will waive it and leave that to him."

The two students glanced at each other with a look of triumph. "Herr Lowenstein, we have both heard your

volunteered offer, which, as a man of honour, you cannot go back from. You are a swordsman, and well known in the duelling ground of the Angels' Meadow, whereas our friend has scarcely ever held a sabre in his hand."

"The plea is a legitimate one," returned Heinrich, "and therefore, I suppose, he chooses the pistol."

"The Herr Max Rechstab is, as you are aware, excessively shortsighted," replied the younger second, "and therefore it would be easy for you to shoot him down, running the merest chance yourself of receiving any injury. He does not therefore choose pistols."

"Then how on earth does he want to fight?" exclaimed Heinrich, impatiently; "does he propose umbrellas or walking-sticks?"

"This is no matter for jesting," returned the elder student, severely. "The quarrel is a mortal one, and our principal demands the *American Duel*."

"The American Duel!" repeated Heinrich, with a slight shudder, "why, that is certain death to one or the other."

"And that is the reason our principal has chosen it," answered the student. "You know the arrangements. In the presence of the four seconds, the two principals will throw the dice, and he who has the lowest number has a week to arrange his affairs; but, at the expiration of that time, he is bound by all the laws of honour to make away with himself in some manner, the mode of doing so being left to his own choice. Quick, do you accede? Our principal is awaiting our return in his room yonder." He pointed through the window as he spoke to a casement on the other side of the central yard, which was not more than eight yards in breadth, which gave light to the room in which Max Rechstab dwelt.

For an instant Heinrich was disposed to refuse the murderous proposal, but he feared to oppose the false code of honour in which he had been brought up, and, with a heavy heart, he agreed to be with his seconds at the rooms of the elder second to settle his fate by the cast of the dice.

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In an hour's time all was ready, and Heinrich and Max, attended by their seconds, stood before a table upon which was placed a dice-box and the dice.

Heinrich, when he first saw his old friend, could hardly desist from stepping forward and clasping him by the hand, for he could make allowance for anyone being subjugated by Ottilia's radiant beauty; but the dark scowl upon the other's

brow deterred him, and he withdrew to a corner of the room, whilst the seconds settled who should first try their fortune.

After some discussion it was settled that Heinrich should have the first cast.

Stepping up to the table, the young man took the box with a firm hand, and, raising it on high, shook it. The dice rattled, and then flew out upon the tablecloth.

"Six and four—ten," cried one of Heinrich's seconds triumphantly. "A splendid throw, my friend; I think you have gained the day."

"Is there no way of settling the matter now that I am in so good a position," inquired Heinrich, hurriedly; "I should never forgive myself if that poor fellow lost. I should always look upon myself as his murderer."

His second, who agreed with him, made the proposition, but it was scornfully rejected by Max and his seconds.

It was now Max Rechstab's turn to throw, and he glided up to the table, his eyes blazing with excitement, raised the box high above his head, and violently jerked out the contents; then, without even glancing at the little ivory tubes, he stood glaring at his former friend with all the vindictiveness of a fiend.

"Sixes—twelve. Max Rechstab, you have won," said the elder of his seconds. "And now, sir," he added, turning to Heinrich, "it only remains for me to remind you of the conditions of the American Duel. You have seven days to prepare your worldly affairs, but on the expiry of the seventh you are bound to put an end to yourself, under the penalty of being shunned by every true-hearted man as a recreant to the Code of Honour. You can cut your life as short as you like, but I warn you to do it in so unmistakable a manner that no one may be afterwards accused of the crime."

"Stay," said one of Heinrich's seconds, "you have forgotten one clause, that if either of the parties to this engagement die from natural causes before the expiration of the seven days, the agreement is null and void and need not be carried out. Am I not right?"

"Yes," answered Max's second, after a moment's hesitation, "you are perfectly correct; such is the law of the American Duel."

"But I am in excellent health," hissed Max, "and have no intention of dying to release you from the penalty you have so justly incurred."

"May the curse of a young life cut short by your act rest upon your head," exclaimed Heinrich, who for the first time

realised the fact that he had only a few days left to live, and that Ottilia was lost to him forever. I shall carry out my compact, and if the dead are permitted to revisit the earth, you shall never be freed from my spiritual presence."

"I have beaten you living, and I am not afraid of you dead," sneered Max; and so the former friends parted, never to meet again.

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"Ottilia, my love, I tell you that I have no option; I should, if I did not obey the sentence of the dice, exist as a dishonoured wretch with whom no one would associate. Could I ask you to link your fate to such an one, and drag the name of Goldberg through the slough and mire of disgrace? No, Ottilia, though the idea of leaving you almost maddens me, yet I have no alternative: my fate is fixed, and there is no appeal open for me." These impassioned and despairing words were uttered by Heinrich as he knelt at the feet of the girl to whom he was engaged. He had felt it his duty to tell her, all under the promise of the strictest secrecy.

"And how do you think that I shall endure the separation?" answered the girl. "Do you forget that I, who have given you my first love, am going to be left alone, all alone, in this cruel world, widowed before I am even a bride? You love your so-called Code of Honour more than you do me."

"I should not be worthy of you did I not consider the honour of your name above everything," answered Heinrich, quickly. By a violent effort Ottilia recovered her calmness, and requested Heinrich to repeat to her all that had occurred on the occasion of the casting of the dice.

"So," said she, when he had concluded; "and so your only chance is that Max Rechstab may die within the seven days, and so release you from your obligation."

"It is but a poor chance," answered Heinrich, "and one that I have never thought of."

"Will you please me in one thing?" answered the girl: "I can't bear to think of you lying dead in that small room which you tell me you occupy. My father, who knows all, has begged me to offer you the little pavilion at the end of the garden; we shall see each other daily, and who knows what may happen. Will you promise me that?" Heinrich agreed, and that day left his room for his last asylum in the count's house.

Max Rechstab was terribly uneasy: the news of his terrible compact with Heinrich Lowenstein had spread over the University, and he was the object of general odium. Heinrich was

so popular that his loss would be generally felt, and besides that it was considered that Max had wantonly provoked the quarrel, and not having the skill or courage to use sabre or pistol, had sheltered himself under the terrible chances of the American Duel.

But besides this, conscience had been at work, and he would have given worlds to have withdrawn from the affair, but this he knew was now impossible. In addition to this he had lately been devoting his attention to supernatural reading, and he was not at all convinced that the threat of his late friend, as to paying him a visit from the other world, was by any means a vain one. Three days only remained, and he grew pale and faint, neglected his food, and smoked incessantly, waiting for the inevitable which was advancing with such giant strides.

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One night Ottilia sat in her own room writing upon a scrap of paper; evidently she had been at the work for some time, for numerous similar scraps lay in fragments on the floor. "I have hit it off at last," murmured she, rising from the table; "my gift of imitating handwriting may serve me well. At any rate, it is our last chance." She turned to the window, and drawing aside the curtain, gazed fondly at a light which shone from the pavilion at the end of the garden. "Oh, my love," sighed she, "I am taking a great responsibility for your sake, but if it succeeds I shall never regret it."

She took up a small parcel and a little deal box, and glided quickly out of the house and made her way towards the house in which the friends had formerly lodged. She gazed carefully around her, and then crept noiselessly up the stairs which led to the room Heinrich had occupied, and the position of which he had often described to her. She stole cautiously to the window and saw that the casement opposite was open. With a quick movement she hurled the paper, which was wrapped round a small leaden ball, into the window of Max Rechstab, and then, crouching down beneath the window, commenced undoing the parcel she had carried.

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Max Rechstab was sitting in his room, his heart full of grief and agony. The end was drawing very near, and his brain was almost turned, and he felt he could endure the suspense no longer. Suddenly something white shot through the window and fell with a heavy thud upon the floor. Mechanically he stooped and picked it up.

It was a small piece of paper, wrapped round a bullet. Upon it were these words in Heinrich Lowenstein's well-known handwriting: "An hour ago I shot myself with this bullet; according to my promise I shall be with you shortly, never to leave you. Look at the window of my old room if you doubt my warning.—H. L."

In ghastly terror Max lifted his eyes, and, framed in the darkness of the open window, he saw the face of his old friend, pale as marble, and with a cruel bloodstain across his forehead. For a moment it stood motionless, and then the spectre, raising its hand with a threatening gesture, moaned, "I am coming," and at once disappeared.

The terrible sight, the pangs of conscience, and the depressed state of mind, all acted upon Max Rechstab's nervous system, and drove him to desperation. With a low moan of anguish he tore open a drawer in his table, and, extracting a pistol from it, shot himself through the heart, and fell dead, just as a woman's figure, rushing into the room, seized the paper and fled away through the darkness of the night.

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"Poor Max," said Heinrich, some three months after the student's suicide, "he must have been quite mad; but it was very fortunate for me that his insanity culminated at the time it did, or I should never have had the happiness to call you my wife. By the way, what did you do with that plaster cast you took of my face soon after we became engaged?"

"I destroyed it," replied Ottilia, with a slight shudder. "What did I want with the counterfeit when I was possessed of the original?"

EXTRADITION EXTRAORDINARY.

A RESPECTABLE TENANT.

For nearly two years Mr. Josiah Armley had been an occasional visitor at the little town of Crumpley, for though he had rented a pretty little villa standing in its own grounds just outside the town, his business avocations would not permit of his residing there permanently. Nevertheless, as he always said, he hoped to do so at no very distant date. Crumpley was a very small town—some people were rude enough to call it a village—and the nearest railway station was seven miles away, so that it really could be called a sequestered spot. Beyond what was contained in the weekly papers, London news did not trouble the inhabitants of Crumpley very much, and a murder of unexampled ferocity, or a swindle of more than usually gigantic proportions, was a topic upon which the village gossips would feed for months, until it, in its turn, gave way to some more absorbing theme of interest.

Mr. Josiah Armley, whenever he did come down, had always a fund of information to disburse at the club, which held its nightly sittings at "The Purple Crocodile," the principal hostelry of Crumpley, and would discant, especially upon men, manners, and things, to an admiring crowd of members.

Mr. Armley was a wiry, muscular man of about five-and-forty years of age, who, however, always complained of a weak chest, and wore a pair of smoke-coloured glasses to assist his defective vision.

He always paid his rent upon quarter-day, ran no bills in town, and was looked upon as a highly respectable man.

One night after the usual toasts had been proposed at the local club, Mr. Armley rose to his feet and begged to be permitted to say a few words. "Gentlemen," said he, as soon as silence had been restored, "I have always told you that it was the dearest wish of my heart to settle down in the peaceful retreats of Crumpley. The cares of business, however, have hitherto prevented me from realising my dreams, but at length I have seen my way, and though by continuing in

business a few years longer I might scrape together a few more thousands, what is wealth when compared to rest and tranquillity? From to-day I become one of yourselves, and I do not care if I never see the great city, with all its hubbub and humbug, its money and its misery, again in my life. Gentlemen, I hope to spend many happy years amongst you."

Mr. Armley sat down amongst vociferous applause, which was heightened when the landlord and his waiter appeared with champagne, which Josiah had ordered in honour of the occasion.

For a week Mr. Armley wandered about Crumpley, increasing everywhere the good opinion he had already gained, and appearing to enjoy resting in his garden, which he facetiously termed taking his *otium cum dig*. At the close of that time, however, news came of a cruel fraud by a firm of solicitors, or, rather, by the only remaining member of the firm, for the name of the other only existed on paper. Mr. Blackside, the attorney in question, had converted every possible security he could lay his hands on into cash, and had modestly withdrawn himself to Spain. As the firm had for many years enjoyed the confidence of a very extensive connection, it can be imagined what ruin and desolation this occasioned, and how many happy homes were irretrievably ruined. There were two cases of suicide and one of hopeless insanity, officers had to leave the army, girls who had never known a care were compelled to go out as governesses. Country mansions were advertised for sale or to be let furnished, and all this time the most astute detectives were unable to track out the peccant Mr. Silas Blackside.

Mr. Josiah Armley was one of the sufferers; all his accumulations had been swept away, and, with the exception of a couple of hundred pounds, which he had deposited in the local bank, he was utterly penniless.

For some time he could do nothing but go from one acquaintance to the other, quote the different reports in the papers, inveigh against the supineness of the police, and wonder why Government permitted a band of licenced rogues, such as attorneys were, to exist at all.

At last, however, he calmed down a little and began to consider what was best to be done. The humble belongings in his little villa were put up to auction, and the sympathising neighbours not only bought them at fancy prices, but raised a subscription amongst themselves which put nearly fifty pounds into the injured man's pocket.

These marks of kindness cheered up Mr. Armley wonderfully, and he at last hit upon a plan of action, which he divulged to some of his most intimate friends. "I am not going to begin work again yet," said he, "but shall devote the little I have saved to hunting down Silas Blackside, and seeing if I cannot make him disgorge."

"And if you find him and he refuses to do so?" asked one of his auditors.

"Shoot him," answered Mr. Armley, in so decisive a tone, that all those who heard him felt sure that he meant what he said.

"I have found one theory regarding these fraudulent absconders;" remarked Mr. Armley, "the reason they are able to get away and keep so close is, because they leave friends behind who keep watch for them and keep them informed of all movements which are made for their capture. Now, if I start I want you to promise not to mention a word of this plan of mine. I am rather well known at the scoundrel's office, and wish I could get abroad without going to town."

"You think he is abroad, then," asked Mattocks the undertaker.

"Between you and I," said Mr. Armley, lowering his voice, "I happen to know that some years ago Blackside purchased a cottage in the Loffoden Isles off the Norwegian coast, and I expect he is there lying close. But not a word to anyone, mind."

"If you want to get to furrin parts without going to Lunnon," remarked Farmer Stubble, "I'm going to drive over to Salleston-in-the-Marsh to-night, to see my father, who is master of a steamer, bound for Antwerp; he'd give you a bed with all his heart."

"The very thing," remarked Mr. Armley, "call for me like a good fellow. Meantime not a word to anyone."

When Farmer Stubble called that night he was a good deal startled to find that Mr. Armley had donned a carrotty wig, and shaved off both whiskers and moustache. His dress he had entirely changed, and he had discarded his glasses.

The cause never was explained to the good farmer, and that night Josiah Armley steamed away in pursuit of the absconding solicitor.

A FOREIGN SANCTUARY.

Perhaps the family which suffered most by the absconding

of Silas Blackside was that of Mr. Carruthers of Gethin Road, Almeira Vale. Mr. Carruthers, though very hard hit, was not absolutely ruined, but the defalcations of the solicitor compelled him to go out again to the East, where he had an extensive coffee plantation, and at the age of sixty that was nearly equivalent to a death warrant. Mrs. Carruthers was an invalid, and sorely missed all the little comforts which she had all her life been accustomed to look on as the necessaries of existence; but the blow fell the hardest on Mildred, who was engaged to George Castleton, who possessed an estate in Loamshire with an income of seven thousand a year.

George, when the thunderbolt fell, was for taking no notice of the matter and letting things go on just as they were before the crash, but Mr. Carruthers insisted on leaving for India, and Mildred positively refused to come to her lover as a penniless bride.

"But, Mildred," argued the young man, "surely there is plenty of money, and when this scoundrel is caught, matters can be set right again."

"I am sure, in spite of all the police say, that he has got out of the country to some place where there is no extradition treaty," said Mildred, decisively, "and there will then be no chance of recovering anything. It is shameful that a man should rob so many, and be allowed to escape scot free. No, George, much as I love you, we must put aside all thoughts of marriage for a time at least."

Whilst she had been speaking a sudden thought flashed through George Castleton's brain. "Look here, Mildred," said he, "we were to have been married in two months; suppose before that time I can get out of the villain the money he has robbed your father of, will you marry me as soon as I place it in his hands, and save him from going to the East?"

The girl looked trustfully into his face. "You have some plan, I am sure," she said; "I will not ask what it is, but remember I shall be on thorns until I see you again."

"And do you think I shall be on a bed of roses?" answered George. "But there, Mildred, give me a kiss, and remember, no more delays to our wedding when I return successful, as I shall do."

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George Castleton had a wealthy bachelor uncle, who resided only a few miles from Crumpley, upon whom he counted for assistance in carrying out his plan, so that, after his parting

with Mildred, he took the train, and in due course was landed at his uncle's gates.

"I want you to lend me twenty-five thousand pounds, uncle," said the young man, after the first greetings had been exchanged.

"Well, you certainly take a long time to get into a mess, but you have done the thing pretty well when you made up your mind," remarked the old gentleman, as he looked in a drawer for his cheque book. "What is the cause, slow horses, stock exchange, or—"

"Nonsense, uncle; I am not in a mess at all," replied George. "You see, that scoundrel Blackside has robbed Mr. Carruthers of that amount, and Mildred has scruples about marrying me until I hunt down the thief and make him refund, so I want to pretend I have done so, and I knew that you would find me the cash until I could make arrangements for raising it."

"It is bad business, George, beginning marriage with mortgages and deception," remarked the old gentleman; "better by far try and bring out the thing *bona fide*. Why, there is a fellow at Crumpley who was robbed by the same scoundrel, and he went off last night to hunt him down. He seemed a keen hand, and with your money and his sense you ought to be able to trap your bird."

George, who hated deception, was pleased with the idea, and going to Farmer Stubbles, who was his uncle's informant, he got a full description of Mr. Josiah Armley, and started in pursuit.

The steamer belonging to Farmer Stubbles' brother had, however, made a quick passage, and George was two days behind his quarry. Money and persistence, however, will do a great deal, and by the employment of both he continued to learn that a gentleman answering to the description of Mr. Josiah Armley had gone to Bruxelles, and from there taken the train to Paris.

"Rather a roundabout way to the Loffoden Isles," thought George; "but I suppose he knows his own business best, and now, let me see if I can pick him up in Paris."

By great good luck George absolutely got hold of the cab-driver who had conveyed a red-haired gentleman, rather shabbily dressed, to a small hotel near the Northern Railway Station, and everything then proved that, on the morning after, the same gentleman had taken the train for Bayonne.

"Dear me," said George Castleton, to himself, "Mr. Arm-

ley's knowledge of geography must be very limited, or he would never go direct to the south of France in order to gain the coast of Norway. Perhaps, however, he picked up some information which caused him to change his plans; I hope I am not following the wrong man—at any rate, here goes for Bayonne."

On his arrival at his destination, George discovered that the meteor-like Mr. Armley had proceeded to the Spanish watering-place of San Sebastian, and thither the young man followed without a moment's delay. The first person he met on alighting at the station was a young Englishman with whom he was on most intimate terms.

"Why, Castleton," exclaimed the latter, "have you come to join the noble army of swindlers, absconding bankrupts, and such like, who seem to have made this little town their head-quarters?"

George, who was rather cautious, put the question aside, but agreed to dine with his friend, and after dinner asked him if he knew much of the English colony.

"All of them, my dear fellow," replied the young man; "but come, you are here with some motive: tell me what it is, and I can perhaps help you."

George, after a moment's deliberation, opened his heart, and said that he was following one Josiah Armley, who was hunting for Silas Blackside."

"Ah," returned his friend, "I would drop Josiah, for the man you both want arrived here two days ago, and a very commonplace dog he is to have done such a power of mischief. I will introduce you to him to-night, but you had better appear to be a young gentleman in difficulties. I pretend to be under a cloud, and that is the reason I am hail-fellow-well-met with the fradulent colony. I have to make copy out of them for my next book."

A LEAF FROM A FRENCH NOVEL.

True to his promise, Bertram Fludyet—for such was the name of George's friend—conducted him to an hotel in the fashionable quarter of the town, knocked at a door, and whispered to the janitor, who opened it.

"What, one of the brotherhood?" said a low voice from within. "Let him enter and listen attentively to the tale our new candidate for admission, Silas Blackside, has to tell us."

George Castleton entered and found himself in a large room

filled with a numerous company, who were smoking and drinking, listening at the same time to a man who was evidently making a sort of statement. "I had long been prepared for the crash," said he, "and had managed a moonshine in the remote town of Crumpley, where I had been known for a couple of years as a highly respectable man, and the tenant of a small villa on the outskirts. Yes, Josiah Armley was thoroughly respectable, and whenever he visited Crumpley, which was pretty often, for he made the villa the hiding-place of all the jewels he intended to take with him in his flight, he was received with open arms by the simple yokels. Then came Master Josiah's chance, for the failure of the firm and the flight of Silas Blackside was in all the papers. Do you follow? Josiah had lost his little all, and vowed that he would hunt down the scoundrel. The good people of Crumpley bought his furniture at splendid prices, raised a subscription of fifty pounds for him, and helped him to get away secretly, so that none of Blackside's friends might suspect that he was hunting him, which was handy, as of course the principal ports were watched—ha, ha! Well, you can guess the rest; Josiah Armley made as fast as he could for San Sebastian, and then throwing off his disguise, blossomed into Silas Blackside, ex-attorney-at-law, with nine hundred thousand pounds in his pocket."

He ceased, and a murmur of applause rose in the room as the recital was concluded.

In spite of the disgust he felt for the man, George Castleton took his seat alongside of him, and made himself as agreeable as he could. "Let me introduce myself," said he; "perhaps you can tell me where I could get a comfortable place to live in, for a time at least. I am Lord Maltby, the brother of the Duke of Hopshire. I have got into a little mess over a trust business, and require seclusion."

Blackside looked at him admiringly. "How much?" asked he.

"Oh, a nice trifle," replied George—"thirty thousand; but I expect my brother will square up, then I shall be all right."

"I have got a charming little place," returned the absconding solicitor, "a regular Castle of Otranto, with all sorts of quaint hiding-places in it. Come and lunch with me to-morrow at two o'clock and we may come to terms. I want company."

"May I bring my friend," asked George, with a motion of his hand towards Bertram Fludyet.

"Bring anyone you like," returned Blackside, "but remember

I have only room for one as a resident. Ask for the 'Vine-dresser's Cottage;' anyone will direct you."

. . . . . .

About twelve o'clock the next day George Castleton and Bertram Fludyet arrived at the "Vinedresser's Cottage," which was a long, low, rambling edifice situated in the older portion of the town. Silas Blackside received them with boisterous merriment and at once proposed that they should sit down to lunch, but this both of his visitors declined.

"Let us see some of the ins and outs of this queer old place," said George.

"All right," returned Silas, "but I must go and get a light first. I kicked out that old hag of a Spanish woman-servant for robbing me, and am quite alone. I hate dishonesty and pilfering."

The young men exchanged glances, and in a few moments the absconding solicitor reappeared with a lantern. "I have heard," remarked he, "that this old place was built on the site of one of the branches of the Inquisition, and if you will come down these stairs, I will show you some of the cells. There is an exit, I am told, some quarter of a mile away in a back street but of course the door is barred."

He led the way down a rugged staircase, which ended in a dark corridor, with small cells on each side. "Nice cool lodgings," said the attorney; "fancy people thinking so much of religion as to lock each other up about it. For my part—"

He never finished his sentence, for George Castleton grasped him by the collar and levelled a revolver at his head, whilst Fludyet tore the lantern from his grasp. "You double-dyed villain," exclaimed George, "I am the affianced husband of one of your victims, and am determined that you shall not go unpunished. Bind his hands, Fludyet, he is delivered over to our hands."

"You dare not hurt me," said Blackside, as Fludyet obeyed his friend's mandate. "The law will protect me."

"Do you dare to invoke the law," retorted George, contemptuously; "but I am not going to hurt you, I am only going to retake the money you stole from those who trusted you."

"I won't give up a shilling," answered Silas, sternly. "Do your worst."

"I am going to take a leaf out of Montecristo," continued George. "Do you remember where Danglars, the absconding banker, is taken by brigands; they do not rob him, but make him pay so exorbitantly for every article of food that his booty is

soon exhausted. I have not the time to make a long work of it, and so shall lock you up in one of these cells, and when you want food and liberty it will be at the expense of your stolen fortune."

Blackside gazed into Castleton's face, but saw no sign of relenting in it. "I will give up the girl's money," said he, after a pause. "How much is it, and who is she?"

"I want all or none," returned George. "Shove him into that cell, Fludyet; it seems to have a good strong bolt on the outside. We will see you again in twelve hours, Mr. Blackside."

George Castleton was as good as his word, but the attorney was still obstinate. At the end of forty-eight hours, however, hunger and thirst won the day, and in a feeble voice he asked, "How much will you leave?"

"The fifty pounds that was subscribed for you by your friends at Crumpley," laughed George.

After a fierce struggle with himself the wretched man yielded, and drawing a huge pocket-book from his breast, cast it at George Castleton's feet, who threw back a fifty-pound note, and left the "Vinedresser's Cottage" with joy at his heart.

On his arrival in London he placed the rescued fortune in Mildred's hands and claimed the fulfilment of her promise, to which the blushing girl offered no opposition. The rest of the money was restored without difficulty, and George Castleton's mode of extradition made him the hero of the hour. As for Silas Blackside, all his golden dreams had vanished at one fell swoop. He crept away from San Sebastian in the night, and ten days later his lifeless body was found in a gorge of the Pyrenees. It is not often that justice overtakes ill-doers so promptly in this world of ours.

THE STAR OF ORANIPORE.

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT.

In the good old days, when John Company ruled the Indian Empire, those who had the good luck to be enrolled beneath his banner had many chances of enriching themselves. Of course this was at the risk of a damaged constitution and an enlarged liver; but what were such trifles when compared to a gigantic banking account and the reputation which attached to an Indian Nabob?

Colonel Miles Peverton was one of these lucky individuals, and various and curious were the stories which were current as to the means by which he had amassed his wealth. Certainly India was a long way off, but for all that, strange rumours travelled across the sea regarding the plundering of temples, the gouging out of idol's eyes when their optics were composed of precious stones, the fastening of slow matches between Maharatta freebooters' fingers as a gentle mode of persuasion to induce them to disclose the secret of the place where they had secreted their plunder. After all, however, these were but trivial matters, and when Colonel Miles Peverton returned to England and purchased the magnificent estate of Dynston Hall, the county families were glad enough to call and accept the profuse hospitality which it delighted the Indian colonel to dispense.

Among the treasures which the colonel had brought home with him was a magnificent diamond, known as the "Star of Oranipore," of great size and lustre.

Colonel Peverton was fond of exhibiting this to his guests, and explaining that he destined this for the adornment of his future wife; but though the fair girls of Loamshire gave the veteran every encouragement, he showed no disposition to enter the bonds of matrimony.

The only relation Miles Peverton possessed was a nephew, the orphaned son of his sister. Spencer Lynton was a tall, handsome young fellow, of about twenty-seven years of age. He possessed a small income of four hundred a year, and had

never manifested a desire to embark in any profession, but lived an easy, careless life, devoting himself chiefly to painting, an occupation which his uncle looked upon with the utmost contempt.

"I wish to heaven you would leave off all that daubing," said the peppery old Indian. "It makes a fellow sick to see you messing about. Why don't you let me send you out to India? that is the place for a man of spirit; besides, I don't want you here. I am going to be married."

"I don't seem to care about India, uncle," answered the young man good-humouredly, "and as for your taking a wife, let me offer you my congratulations. Who is the lucky young lady?"

"I don't think you will be so ready to offer your congratulations when you know her name," returned the colonel, with a sneer. "I am going to marry Lesbia Hammond."

The young man staggered back as if he had received a heavy blow. "Lesbia Hammond," repeated he; "impossible, why she is engaged to me."

"*Was*, you mean," retorted the old man, with a grin. "Girls are too sensible nowadays to take up with a penniless youngster when they can hook a wealthy old man."

"You lie," cried Spencer Lynton, "Lesbia would never throw me over; she is an honest true-hearted girl. It is you and her scheming old mother who have arranged this marriage."

"You insolent dog," roared the old man, his face purpling with indignation, "how dare you say that I lie," and snatching up a heavy whip he made a slash at his nephew's face.

But Spencer Lynton was not the man to be assaulted with impunity, and in an instant the whip was wrenched from the colonel's hand, and in another moment lay in fragments on the carpet. As the two men stood confronting each other, the door slowly opened, and a Hindoo servant dressed in snowy garments entered the room and stepped between the combatants.

"Colonel sahib," said he, spreading out his hands before him in a gesture of supplication, "your slave entreats you to calm yourself; anger becomes not grey hairs, and the hand that has warred with men should not be raised against a boy."

"Kesaree," cried the colonel, furiously, "that insolent dog shall pack out of this. I have been feeding the pauper too well, and, like a spiteful dog, he snaps at my hand."

Spencer Lynton's face was livid with rage. "I will do more than snap at your hand," cried he, "and unless you give up all

thoughts of Lesbia Hammond, I will qualify you for that fine marble tomb you have built for yourself in the park, as if the churchyard was not good enough for you."

"Hush, hush!" said the Hindoo servant, taking the young man by the arm and gently leading him to the door. "The words of anger only fall back upon the head of the speaker, and no one knows what ears may hear threats never meant to be carried out."

Spencer Lynton permitted himself to be won over by the soft words of the Hindoo, and as soon as the door had been closed on the infuriated colonel, the dusky native began to speak again.

"Go to your room, sahib, or mischief will come. I know my master better than you. He likes to tease and torment those about him; he has no thoughts of wedding the fair girl. Keep to your room to-night, I will see that dinner is sent up to you, and to-morrow the storm will have blown over. The ways of peace are pleasant ways, but strife is a stony road to the feet."

Much cheered by Kesaree's statement, and half ashamed of his violence, Lynton retired to his chamber, and occupied himself with completing a portrait of Lesbia Hammond, which he was painting from memory.

About seven o'clock one of the footmen brought up his dinner tray, and placed it on the table.

"What are you grinning about?" demanded Lynton, as he saw a smile on the man's face.

"The colonel be a funny gentleman, sir," answered the rustic serving man. "When Mr. Kesaree asked him to let me take your dinner, he asked whether he wanted to fatten you up to make you strong enough to murder him."

"And it would serve him right if I did so," exclaimed Lynton, who was furious at his uncle's having referred to their quarrel before the menials. "If ever a man deserved to have his throat cut it is, Miles Peverton."

The man looked rather scared at this savage outburst, and put down the tray hastily, but he did not forget to tell the domestics in the servants' hall what a blazing murderous temper young Master Lynton was in, nor did they forget his words when the next morning the wild cries of Kesaree attracted them to the colonel's room, and they saw the master of Dynston Hall stretched upon his bed, the gorgeous trappings of which were drenched in gore, with his throat cut from ear to ear, half-a-dozen gaping wounds in his chest and abdomen,

any of which would have been sufficient to have let out the life which lurks in the human frame.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.

The first idea of the affrighted domestics was to hasten to the room of the murdered man's nephew. As no answer was made to their knocks and calls, they turned the handle and found that the door yielded to their efforts.

On entering the room, however, a cry of mingled terror and indignation burst from every throat.

Spencer Lynton was stretched upon his bed, and appeared to be buried in the deep slumber of intoxication. A brandy bottle more than half empty stood upon the table, and the air was sickly with the reek of spirits.

A little inebriety, however, would not have shocked the servants, for these were the days of hard drinking, but it was the other appearance in the room which filled their souls with horror and disgust. There was blood everywhere, blood on the carpets, blood on the rich silken hangings drawn across the windows, blood on the towels and on the pillow-cases. The wash-hand basin was filled with gory water, and the shirt of the sleeping man was marked in several places with the same cruel stain.

"He murdered the master, and then shut himself up in his room and drank himself silly," said the butler. "See, there is the very knife with which he did the deed." And as he spoke he picked up, with manifest repugnance, a curved Indian dagger, clotted with blood from point to hilt. "We had better make sure of him," said the black man, "for if he wakes and begins starting about with that pig-butcher's knife, we'll all be dead men."

The proposal seemed to meet with general acceptance, and when Spencer Lynton opened his eyes, he found himself bound hand and foot, amid the centre of a circle of threatening faces.

The young man seemed still to be under the influence of liquor, for he made no remark, but gazed around him with a dazed and helpless expression of face.

The evidence against him was damning. Kesaree had been present at the conclusion of the quarrel, and the footman had heard the threatening words uttered by the nephew. It had for some weeks been the subject of local gossip that the colonel was paying his addresses to the young man's sweetheart, and this at once supplied the motive for the crime.

Squire Harbottle, a hard-riding, port-wine-drinking justice of the peace was soon upon the spot, and at once ordered the young man's removal to jail. Then it was that Spencer Lynton appeared to cast aside the lethargy which oppressed him, and in the strongest terms protested his innocence. He declared that, after eating his dinner, a strange feeling of drowsiness had stolen over him, and that, unable to resist it, he had partially undressed and flung himself upon his bed. From this moment he recollected nothing more, though he had a vague idea that someone had entered the room, though he could not say at what time.

Of course this explanation did not in any way exculpate him, and in spite of his remonstrances he was removed.

Meanwhile a careful examination had been made of the dead man's chamber, and a startling discovery was made. The celebrated diamond, the Star of Oranipore, together with a large number of precious stones, had disappeared.

Spencer Lynton's room was carefully searched, but no traces of the missing gems could be discovered.

Kesaree, who was most anxious to afford information, stated that his deceased master kept these gems in a cabinet in his bedroom, but the door had been forced and the receptacle was empty, save for a small sealed packet, which the dusky domestic said his master had always informed him contained his wishes as to the disposition of his body.

As Spencer Lynton, who was undoubtedly the heir-at-law, was not qualified to break the seal, Squire Harbottle took upon himself to do so, and, on perusing the contents, found that Kesaree had been perfectly correct in what he had stated.

The memorandum contained in the packet was a very brief one, though of an extraordinary character. It said that the writer had always had a morbid dread of being buried alive. That, with a view to prevent this, he had caused a marble mausoleum to be erected in the park. To this his body was to be conveyed, no matter from what cause he died, and was to remain there in charge of Kesaree until signs of decomposition set in, when it was to be interred in the granite sarcophagus which stood in the centre of the building. After this duty had been performed, the dusky servitor was to receive the sum of one hundred pounds and a free passage to his native country.

At this stage of the proceedings Kesaree burst out into an effusion of gratitude, and declared that, after he had performed his last duties to his dead master, he should leave for his own land, a broken-hearted man.

In accordance with these instructions the body of the murdered man was removed to the sumptuous building which he had caused to be erected in the park, and Kesaree followed, with his head sunk upon his breast and every appearance of abject sorrow.

Night closed over Dynston Hall, and one by one the lights were extinguished, and not a ray was to be seen save the gleam which shone out from the window pierced in the roof of the mausoleum in the park. The news of the murder had spread far and wide, and had even penetrated to the little cottage where Lesbia Hammond dwelt with her mother, a shrewd, designing woman, who had favoured the colonel's wooing as soon as she found that he had been attracted by her daughter's fresh young charms. But Lesbia had ever remained true to her first love, and had given her elderly admirer no encouragement, and it was this which had piqued him into making the statement about his engagement which had led to the altercation with his nephew.

That night Lesbia retired to rest, and after praying for the preservation of her lover, sank into the deep sleep which Providence sometimes mercifully vouchsafes to exhausted mortals.

She dreamed that the murdered man stood beside her, whispering in her ear, "The mausoleum in the park, haste thee."

She started from her sleep, and as she sat up in bed, the room seemed filled with the echo of the same words.

Without pausing to think, she dressed, and, creeping out of the cottage, made her way to Dynston Hall. As she passed the cross roads she heard the rapid tramp of a horse's feet, and in a few minutes old Squire Harbottle pulled up beside her. "Curious," said he, with an oath, "but he told me I should find you here."

"He—who do you mean?" demanded the girl.

"Old Colonel Peverton," answered the squire; "he has been at my bedside half the night, and told me to have a horse saddled and meet you at the cross roads. Put your foot on the toe of my boot, jump up in front, and tell me where I am to take you."

"To the mausoleum in Dynston Park," answered Lesbia, as she obeyed his injunctions.

THE FINDING OF THE DIAMOND.

Twenty minutes brought the strangely-met pair to the outside of the belt of trees, in the centre of which the mausoleum

was situated, and Squire Harbottle, alighting from his panting steed, asked his companion what the next move was to be. "I don't believe in ghosts or any tomfoolery of that kind," remarked he, "but I could almost swear that I saw the old colonel's face at one of those lighted windows. I wouldn't be that poor devil of a nigger who has to keep watch over the mangled body for a thousand pounds, though I am as hard up just now as a man can be."

Lesbia was gazing about her in a half dreamy sort of way. "Is there no means of seeing what is going on within," asked she. "My heart tells me that we are on the eve of some great discovery."

Squire Harbottle gazed around him for a moment, and then remarked, "There is a ladder under the wall of the building. I will fasten up old Red Lancer to a tree, and then we can ascend by the ladder and see what is doing within through the windows in the dome; but I say, Lesbia, my girl, what is the good of all this, we shall only see the black fellow fast asleep, or else smoking that outlandish pipe of his, which looks for all the world like a great snake, for the niggers, I have heard, look upon death as a mere nothing."

"Never mind what you think, squire," returned Lesbia, with a little impatient stamp of the foot, "I feel that I am right; but do please make haste."

Grumbling a little at her obstinacy, the squire secured his horse, and then by a great exertion of strength raised the ladder and placed it against the wall of the mausoleum. "Come, my girl," said he, when the task was accomplished. "Up you go, but don't be frightened, for the sight your eyes will light upon will be a gruesome one, I expect."

Light as a bird, Lesbia ascended the ladder, and the squire followed her with more care and considerably less agility. The girl soon reached the terrace which ran round the dome, and gazed down into the interior through one of the many windows with which it was pierced.

As the squire had told her, a weird sight was presented to her eyes.

The body of the murdered man lay upon a slab covered by a white sheet, beneath which the rigid outline of the limbs could easily be seen. The lid of the huge granite sarcophagus, which was to prove the last receptacle for the dead, had not been removed, and the atmosphere of the circular chamber was heavy with the resinous gum which was burning in chafing-dishes supported on tall brazen stands.

But the strangest figure of all was Kesaree, the confidential servant of the dead man. He had cast aside his snow-white garments, which lay in a heap on the other side of the chamber, and merely retained a scanty waist-cloth. His bronzed skin shone and glistened in the lamplight, like that of the cobra of his native land. His turban had been cast aside, and his long hair, glittering with oil, hung in elf-locks over his bare shoulders. There was a wild glare of delight in his eyes, and an air of triumph in every curve of his limbs; and no one who had been accustomed to gaze upon the meek and servile Hindoo body-servant would have recognised in him the excited fanatic who was bending over the corpse like a vulture about to commence its hideous feast.

For a moment Kesaree gloated over the body of his late employer, and then, as if inspired by a feeling which he was unable to control, he burst out,—

"Yes, mighty soldier, here you are, struck down at the moment when you fancied you had escaped the hand of retribution—yes, when you never fancied that the hand of Fate was lurking behind you. Do you recollect by what means you acquired the Star of Oranipore? Do you remember when, after the surrender of his palace, he called you into his private room and offered you his sword, that the gorgeous diamond was glistening upon the breast of his *chupkan*? Listen to me, Miles Peverton, for I speak to you in your own tongue, not in that which you learned in our land. Have you forgotten how you shot him down, and after you had left his lifeless corpse stretched upon the marble floor, you came out, declaring that he had attempted your life, and saying nothing of the Star of Oranipore, which you had made yourself master of, and had secreted in your breast. And now I will tell you what you did not know, and which you have therefore not forgotten. There was a child of some twelve years of age lurking behind the *musnud*, who was a witness of the robbery and the murder—the only son of the Rajah, and the heir to his possessions, which were confiscated by the inevitable Company. *He* swore that he would have vengeance and recover the diamond,—the heirloom of his race. *I* am he,—*I*, Kesaree, your humble servant, who has waited for his chance for years, and now it has come. One of your accursed race will be hanged for your murder. After I had slain you as you lay sleeping, I stole to your nephew's room. I had seen that the wine he had taken with his dinner was drugged, and left every trace in his room of the deed I had

committed, even to the curved knife, which, on account of its enamelled setting, you stole from the body of my murdered father. And this night I take back, not only the Star of Oranipore, but many other precious stones, from the secret hiding-place which I prepared in your vile body."

As he spoke he twitched away the white sheet which covered the corpse, and with the gesture of a fiend buried his hands in the gaping aperture which yawned in the abdomen of the slaughtered man, and drew from it a mass of glittering gems, the lustre of which shone out in the light, despite of the blood stains which dimmed their hue.

"Great heavens!" cried Squire Harbottle, "if it was the old man's spirit, he has put me on the right track." And sliding down the ladder, he burst open the door of the mausoleum, and in another moment was grappling with the murderer, who, terror-stricken at the sudden apparition, offered but feeble resistance.

Kesaree evaded justice by the use of one of those powerful drugs with which Orientals are acquainted, and which he had contrived to secrete about his person.

Spencer Lynton was released without a stain upon his character. He disposed of Dynston Hall, as the circumstances connected with it were too unpleasant to enable him to enter there again with comfort, but when he led Lesbia Hammond to the altar, on her bridal corsage gleamed the Star of Oranipore.

AN AUSTRALIAN GHOST.

ANYONE who is acquainted with our Australian colonies, especially with New South Wales, will remember the excitement which prevailed when this well substantiated tale of supernatural appearance was first bruited abroad.

Though a comparatively young country, Australia is old in ghostly legendary lore, and many and strange are the tales of apparitions which have come to us from the land of gold.

Fisher's ghost, which created so great an excitement in Melbourne and its vicinity, is too well known to require more than a passing allusion, whilst Henry Kingsley, in his "Recollections of Geoffrey Hamlyn," has given us little bits of ghost-lore which make us long for a further supply.

The black fellows, too, when they can be got to talk, have wild and weird tales to narrate of the supernatural denizens of the scrub, and the mysterious bunyip which resides in the waterholes, and is the more dreaded because human eye has never caught sight of his form. Yes, prosaic as people may consider Australia, it is, after all, a land of romance. Even its horrors of crime are different from the cut-throats of the older continents, and the atrocities of Schinderhannes pale before the fiendish outrages of Michael Howe, whilst Dick Turpin's ride to York is not more wonderful than the fate of the iron-clad Kelly. So many persons witnessed the apparition, the tale of which we are about to give to our readers, that no room is left for doubt of any description, and with this brief prelude we may as well plunge into our story without further delay.

Windsor and Richmond stand on opposite sides of the valley down which the river Hawkesbury flows, which is spanned by a bridge where the highroad which connects the two towns runs down to the banks of the stream. Some four miles up the river, on the Richmond side, was the farm of a man named Morgan, who was not held in any great estimation by his neighbours. Not that any definite charge could be brought against him, for he neither drank, gambled, or in any way made himself objectionable; but for all that, there was a something about him which inspired a feeling of inexpressible re-

pugnance; and so it happened that he was shunned by his neighbours, and but few of the better sort ever crossed the threshold of his dwelling.

In spite, however, of this feeling, Morgan was not absolutely cut, and when the inhabitants of either Windsor or Richmond met him on the road, the usual forms of salutation were gone through.

One bright summer morning in November, as a Mr. Marker and his wife were driving from Windsor to Richmond, they met Morgan, seated in his shabby old buggy, drawn by a raking chestnut horse with a white blaze down his face, which was as well known in the neighbourhood as Morgan himself.

"'Morning, Mr. Marker," said the farmer, as the two vehicles came alongside of each other.

"Good-morning, Mr. Morgan," was the response. "A fine day, is it not?"

"Yes," answered Morgan, "a precious deal too fine a day for a man to commit such a foolish act as I am on my way to do."

"Why, you have not the credit of acting unwisely as a rule," returned Marker, who, in spite of his repugnance, seemed impelled by some mysterious power to converse with the man.

"Well," answered Morgan, as a saturnine grin passed over his dark features, "I daresay some people would congratulate me, and say that I was doing the right thing; but, to make a long story short, I am going to bring my wife home."

"Your wife," repeated Mrs. Marker, in the utmost surprise; "are you going to be married, Mr. Morgan?"

"There you are," returned the farmer; "trust a woman for almost going off her head when marriage is mentioned; but you haven't got hold of the right pig by the ear this time—I've been a married man these seventeen years and more."

"Seventeen years!" exclaimed Mr. Marker. "Why, you have been fifteen years on your farm, and I've never seen a sign of a wife belonging to you."

"You see," answered Morgan, with a sneer, "you don't often condescend to favour me with a visit, but for all that, you are right. Two years after we had got hitched, the missis and I agreed to differ and separate, precious nearly the only thing we ever did agree about. At any rate, we have kept it up until now, when she is coming back to me."

"Well, it all seems very strange," answered Mrs. Marker, "to come together after so long an interval. How did it happen?"

"Perhaps softer feelings flowed in," replied Morgan, with his habitual sneer, "like we read of in the story books, or perhaps it was owing to Mrs. M. coming into possession of a bit of money,—most likely the latter."

"Well, good-morning," broke in Marker, a little annoyed at the man's manner. "I wish you luck in your new start in the matrimonial line."

"Can Morgan be speaking the truth?" asked Mrs. Marker, when the two vehicles were a little distance apart.

"I am sure I don't know," returned her husband; "all I know is that I pity Mrs. Morgan from the bottom of my heart. Fancy a woman with money of her own going to live with such a brute, when she was once free of him."

"Perhaps she loved him," observed Mrs. Marker, sentimentally.

"Love such a fellow? Pah! the idea makes me sick," answered her husband, whipping up his horse. "But whatever may be the reason, evil will come of it. Perhaps, however, after all, Morgan was lying," he added, and this afterthought appeared to give him considerable satisfaction.

In this case, however, Morgan had told the truth, and in a few days he and his wife, a buxom-looking woman of six-and-forty, were to be seen driving to market and elsewhere in the shabby-looking buggy, drawn by the big chestnut horse.

Morgan, however, was no more companionable than he had been, and Mrs. Morgan was not the kind of woman to invite sympathy. Rumour asserted that she drank hard, and that sounds were heard from the farmhouse occupied by the Morgans, as if violent quarrels were taking place.

Morgan's face, however, was inscrutable, and he made no allusion to domestic difficulties of any kind.

The valley between Richmond and Windsor was frequently inundated by the rising of the river, and some months after the return of Mrs. Morgan one of these floods took place. Though the force of water was not sufficient to tear away the bridge, yet it damaged one of the piers, a portion of which was dislodged, leaving a gaping fissure. Finding, however, that the bridge still remained firm, the local authorities, with that sort of happy-go-lucky mode of acting which distinguishes corporate bodies in the Antipodes, adjourned the repairs until a future day, and the bridge continued to be used as freely as before. The destruction, however, caused by the flood was soon merged in a fresh sensation, for Morgan was now seen driving about alone in his buggy, and the rubicund face of Mrs. Morgan was conspicuous by its absence.

At first no one thought of questioning the surly farmer, but after a time curiosity overcame prejudice, and Mrs. Marker, meeting him one day on the way to market, boldly attempted to solve the vexed question.

"Is Mrs. Morgan ill that we see nothing of her now?" asked she.

"Ill; how should I know whether she is ill or well?" answered he, sulkily.

"Not know whether your wife is ill or well!" repeated Mrs. Marker, in accents of profound astonishment.

"No," retorted he; "is there anything wonderful in a man not knowing what is going on somewhere else?"

"I don't understand you," stammered Mrs. Marker.

"I don't see that there is any need for you to do so," snapped he, "but if you want the whole truth, here it is: the jade has left me again."

"Left you; and, pray, when did she do so?" demanded Mrs. Marker, more interested than ever.

"Oh, about a fortnight or three weeks ago," answered he.

"That is impossible," remarked the lady, decisively, "for the floods were out, and no living soul could have left the valley."

"What do you mean by talking to me about living souls?" growled the man, savagely. "I don't charge my memory with facts about a worthless woman, and I can't see what people want to go ferretting out information which does not concern them." And with these words he applied the whip vigorously to the chestnut, and in a very brief period was out of sight. Mrs. Marker lost no time in disseminating the startling intelligence of the second separation between man and wife, and many guesses were hazarded as to the cause of the flight of Mrs. Morgan.

By degrees, however, it began to be remembered that the floods were out at the time of the disappearance, and that no one had seen the departure of the wife—nay, more, no one had set eyes upon her for some time before.

At last the talk became so loud, and the suspicions of foul play rose to such a magnitude, that the police officials thought it necessary to take the matter up, and accordingly a domiciliary visit was paid to the farm of the deserted husband.

He received the troopers with his usual sullen demeanour, but offered no opposition to their researches. He lit his pipe, and throwing himself into a chair, told them they might search every nook and corner of the house. "But mind," he added, "if

you do any damage, I shall hold you responsible, and you and my lawyer will have to settle the matter."

The police availed themselves of the charily granted permission, and proceeded with their perquisitions.

The missing woman was certainly not immured in any part of the house, a fact concerning which there had been very strong suspicions; but, on the other hand, trunks marked with her initials, a large stock of wearing apparel, and various essentially feminine articles were discovered.

After a long and wearisome search, the police returned to the room where the master of the house was still seated, lazily watching the wreaths of smoke as they curled up to the ceiling from the bowl of his pipe.

"Well," said he, with his habitual sneer, "have you found the old woman?"

"I want to know how it is that Mrs. Morgan, when she went away, left all her clothes and belongings behind her?" answered the officer.

"Do you really, now?" retorted Morgan. "It strikes me that you want to know a great deal more than I am going to tell you."

"Look here, Morgan," remarked the official, "it will be better for you in the end to make a clean breast of it, I can assure you."

Morgan started from his seat, and dashed his pipe fiercely upon the ground. "How dare you speak to me like that?" cried he, with a volley of oaths. "Am I to consider myself in custody?"

"Why, you know well enough that you are not," returned the officer.

"Then get out of my house, or I will have you indicted for trespassing," shouted the angry man, as he flung open the door, and motioned to the troopers to leave the house.

There was no help for it. Nothing had been found which would cause suspicion, and the crestfallen police had to do as they were ordered, and leave Morgan to his own devices.

And now a change came over the farmer, and from a temperate man he became a frequenter of bars and liquor shops. Day after day he was to be found in one or other of those places, indulging freely; and had not the old chestnut been one of the most sedate of animals, and taken matters into his own hands when he found his master incapable of directing his movements, Morgan must certainly have broken his neck after some of his debauches.

It was noticed, however, that there was a certain amount of method in Morgan's alcoholic madness. He never remained out after dark, or if he did so, and had to cross the bridge on his return home, he would make arrangements for sleeping where he was, and not make a start until the next morning. By degrees, the gossip relating to the disappearance of Mrs. Morgan died away, and fresh topics cropped up, which afforded food for conversation.

One evening Mr. and Mrs. Marker had been entertaining a party of friends, some half-dozen in number, and, as it was a lovely night, agreed to walk with them as far as the bridge, on their way home. The moon, as has been said, was a very brilliant one, and objects were discernible by its light at a great distance.

As the merry party neared the bridge, laughing and joking, they caught sight of what appeared to be a female figure sitting on or resting against the rail of the bridge.

Wondering who it could be who had selected the bridge rail for a seat at that hour of night, the little party moved quietly forward, when, as they got abreast of the figure, it suddenly vanished.

Scarcely believing their eyes, they moved forward a few paces, when, on looking round, they perceived the figure in the same position which it had occupied before.

Several of the ladies shrieked and gave signs of fainting, and Mr. Marker and a friend, mustering up courage, walked up to the figure. As they neared it Marker hurled a heavy stick he carried full at it. The missile went clean through the figure, and fell with a dull splash into the stream below, and at the same time his companion called out, "Great heavens, it is Mrs. Morgan!"

Hardly had the words escaped his lips, than the swift clatter of a horse's feet was heard, and the rolling of wheels, as if some vehicle was being driven at a furious rate.

In another moment a buggy appeared, drawn by a chestnut horse, and standing up in it was Morgan, mad with drink, and lashing his horse furiously. The great chestnut was white with foam, its ears were laid back on its head, and its eyeballs were almost starting out of its head as if with terror.

Right and left the little party scattered to avoid the furious rush of the drunken driver, and as they did so, they all distinctly saw a white figure standing full in the path of the half-maddened animal.

It was all over in a minute. The chestnut, with a shrill neigh

of terror, swerved half round, and dashing the buggy against the rails, sprang over them. For an instant the unhappy animal remained suspended over the water, then with a crash and a harsh-rending sound, wood and leather gave way, and it fell into the river, striking heavily against one of the projecting buttresses of the bridge as it did so.

The spectators of this terrible scene stood aghast, watching the white figure, which for an instant bent over the ruins of the buggy, and then vanished as mysteriously as it had done before.

No human aid could avail Morgan; his neck was broken, and when he was raised from the ground he was quite dead.

. . . . . .

Next morning there was quite a crowd of visitors to inspect the scene of the tragedy, and then for the first time a search was made for the horse.

Men in boats, with long poles began sounding the river, and at length the carcase of the drowned animal was discovered, having been sucked by the current into the fissure in the damaged buttress.

One of the spectators, a young man who had obtained some renown as a swimmer, volunteered to dive and fasten a rope round the animal, by which it could be hauled up to the surface.

After a rather protracted absence beneath the water, he came up to the surface, and with a face pale with agitation, murmured, "I have got the rope round something; for Heaven's sake, help me into the boat, for I feel deadly sick."

As soon as this had been done, a dozen willing hands strained at the rope, when, instead of the body of the chestnut, the hideously decomposed corpse of Mrs. Morgan appeared on the surface of the water.

An universal cry of horror rang out from the bridge, and from both banks of the river, as the terrible truth was made manifest; and as soon as possible the remains of the murdered woman were removed to the mortuary of the hospital at Richmond.

Murdered she had assuredly been, for round her neck was tightly twisted a silk handkerchief, which bore her husband's name, and had certainly been the means of causing her death.

It was supposed that Morgan had strangled his wife during the floods for the sake of the money she possessed, and had then thrown the body into the river in the hope that it might be borne far away, but the force of the waters had jammed it into the fissure, and Providence had permitted the spirit of the

murdered woman to appear upon the spot beneath which her body was lying.

The surprising spiritual manifestation was a good deal talked of at the time, and for many months afterwards the inhabitants of both Windsor and Richmond were excessively shy of crossing the bridge, especially upon a moonlight night, any time about Christmastide.

THE END.

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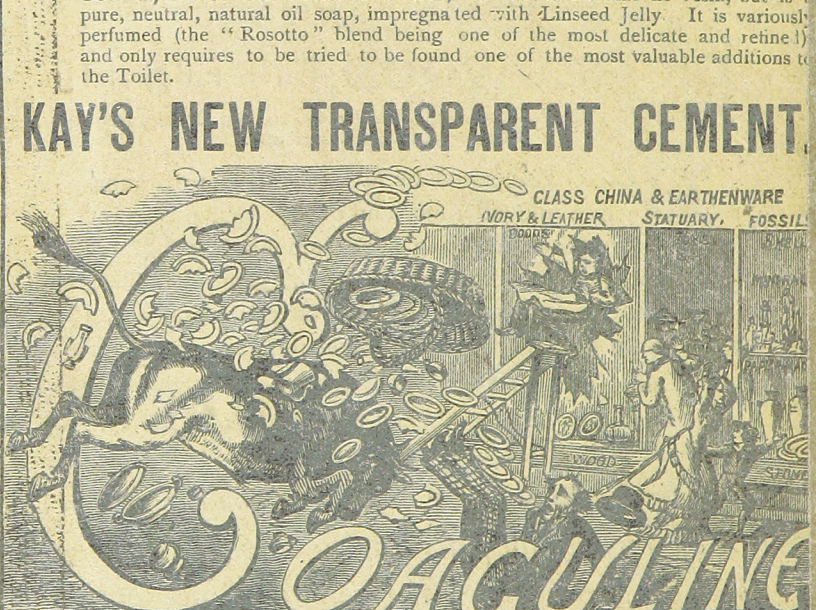

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